

South African travel agents giving the internet a run for its money

Technology, digitisation and automation - travel agents have faced numerous disruptions over the past few years. Newspapers have even predicted the end of the travel agent altogether, saying the travel consultant will soon become extinct. However, instead of succumbing to outside pressures, the South African travel industry has become stronger, and ASATA travel agents have even given the internet a run for its money.



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The internet can take orders but can it offer proactive consulting?

Sure Travel has focussed on proactive consulting and offering concierge-style services to its clients instead of limiting itself to order taking. Sure Travel's Robyn Daneel Spicer explains that Sure Travel consultants are anticipating what the client wants in order to be able to offer their clients the best value-for-money offering.

Says Spicer: "An online travel agency can quote you on flights to small towns in remote parts of the world even if these flights will take over 24 hours of travel. A Sure travel agent will investigate cutting travel time and find the best routing in terms of airfares, trains, and transfers. The client thinks they know what they want, but it is up to us as advisors to guide them in the right direction."

The internet has created tech-savvy travellers, but also customer-centric agents

The ease of booking travel online hasn't only attracted tech-savvy travellers but also agents who are customer-centric, according to Club Travel.

Club Travel's Luana Visagie explains many potential clients are confused by mixed reviews found online and are overwhelmed when it comes to penalties for changes and cancellations. "This is where a clued-up consultant is able to put the client at ease by asking questions, profiling the client and limiting options to those which really appeal to the client's needs and budget," she says.

Visagie says the disruptions the industry has faced, have pushed travel consultants to remain on top of their game. "The industry competition is tough and will only get tougher, so agents need to know how to 'wow' their clients to the point that they are referring their friends and family to their agent."

The internet can't offer corporate travellers an end-to-end solution, but travel agents can

Marco Ciocchetti, CEO XL Travel, explains that the role of travel management companies or TMCs has become and will continue to evolve in finding end-to-end solutions for their clients from the booking process to the expense management of the company.

A corporate travel agent will offer clients a comprehensive optimisation of the company's travel spend, as well as data consolidation and reporting. The ASATA travel agent will ensure travellers toe the line and are compliant with the company's travel policy. They will also make sure the traveller is safe and put together a professional duty of care programme.

Can't beat the technology wave? Join it

Club Travel's Visagie explains there is no doubt the increase and growth of online travel platforms like booking.com, Airbnb and others have resulted in many more 'DIY travellers' and this has disrupted the industry. But, she says that instead of resisting this change, Club Travel offers clients the opportunity to make their bookings on any of Club Travel's online booking platforms. The difference is that they have access to a support team if need be.

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