

Travel companies in tune with the tech savvy traveller will thrive

 By [Cari Coetzee](#)

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Wendie White, the MD of Lloyd Orr Communications which specialises in communications strategies for travel and tourism organisations has enjoyed 32 years' experience in the South African travel industry, having spent most of her career in wholesale outbound tour operating. We asked White to give us her outlook on Tourism 2017.



Wendie White

■ ***What are the biggest trends that will influence South Africa's travel industry in 2017?***

Wendie White: Mobile online booking - as more and more young South Africans of all backgrounds are catching the travel bug, they are looking to access all the info and booking tools using their smartphones.

Experiential travel - getting away from it all means more than spending a week on the beach and South Africans want to spend their precious time and money getting real experiences out of their travel spend

■ ***What trend, according to you, will exert the biggest influence and why – which trend is a game changer?***

White: South Africa is one of the world's fastest growing user of smartphones. A handheld device or a smartphone allows travellers instant access to the world and all it can offer. Just as a pair of Nike's can easily be ordered from a handheld device, so can an air ticket to Dubai, an application for a visa, a hotel booking and a short fixed wing flight over the city.

■ ***What are some of the main challenges facing the travel industry and travel companies?***

White: Whilst today's travellers are mostly tech savvy and know how to search and transact online, they will still turn to their travel agent for expert advice and individual attention. Travel companies, therefore, must adapt and ensure they focus on delivering a customer-centric service that caters to the growing demands of today's travellers. This means having up to date systems that can deliver instant information based on specific needs, all accessible on the customers preferred device at any time of the day or night. Companies, and there are many such professional travel companies in South Africa, who are in tune with this fluid and ever changing way of doing business, will survive and thrive.

▣ ***How can and should travel companies adapt to leading trends and challenges?***

White: Staying up to date with modern technology and its ability to reach potential customers is key to staying relevant in the industry.

Travel agents and tour operators can offer a much more tailor-made customer centric service than an unknown item on a screen for passengers. However, they need to be there in the search space in order to harness the customer loyalty.

Strong and interactive social media networking with existing and potential customers is essential in this new era in terms of staying in touch with what the customer is seeking. Destinations, travel products, and experiences need to be seen and heard through the many available touch points in the social media space.

▣ ***What are the main trends we'll see from travellers themselves – where they choose to go and how they choose to travel?***

White: South Africans, like many consumers around the world, are influenced by what they can see, hear and experience. If someone they know or follow is posting amazing images on Instagram or tweeting about their experiences, they want to see, feel, hear and do it themselves. With our weak rand, South African travellers are always seeking value for money and so special offers or value added benefits gain the most traction in terms of attraction that lead to a final booking. Ease of travel too, on South African passports, either visa-free or a smooth application visa process is key to the decision on where to go and what to do.

▣ ***What do you hope to see more of in 2017?***

White: South Africans from all backgrounds are emerging as keen travellers. Travelling is an education in itself and I hope to see many more young South Africans getting their passports stamped and getting out there to see the world and all the richness that travel can offer.

▣ ***Any advice you would like to share with the industry?***

White: Stay one step ahead of the game, research and educate yourself on what people are looking for in terms of their travel patterns. Look for ways to offer the client an added benefit that they would not have if they were going it alone and bypassing the professional services on offer in the industry. Reach the potential travellers consciousness by interacting with them on social media and offer them multiple avenues by which to engage with you. This is the age of 24/7 365. Be accessible, and make sure your company is a visible, viable option that stands out in the myriad of options available.

ABOUT CARI COETZEE

Cari Coetzee is a contributor to Bizcommunity Tourism, Agriculture and Lifestyle.

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