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Comair thinks Big

DORINE REINSTEIN

COMAIR is one of the first airlines in South Africa to step into the Big Data era of the airline industry, tailoring services to its clients.

Ceo, **Erik Venter**, told *TNW* the airline aimed to become more predictive about what customers want, before they even know they want it.

The airline is looking for ways to enhance its operating performance and revenue-generating opportunities during a sluggish economy, where airlines are faced with a declining passenger market and high operating costs, Erik says.

Despite posting strong results for the 12-month period ending June 30, 2014, with a 16% increase in net income to R265m, Erik says airlines – and the travel industry in general – are still facing a tough few years ahead. “In the absence of strong GDP growth, the travel industry is going to have to focus on efficiency while at the same time tailoring its offering to specific customer requirements.”

In order to tailor its offering to specific customer requirements, the airline is currently doing a lot of work around data management. Erik says Comair is developing a model that will allow the airline to target the right customers with the right products.

“We will be following the Amazon.com model, whereby we offer our customers travel packages and products based on their historic purchasing patterns and their personal profiles. This is independent of developing our product range, and is more about finding the right product for each customer.” Erik did not divulge details of how Comair would

“The airline aims to become more predictive about what customers want, before they even know they want it.”

implement this.

Amazon has been recognised as an important new facilitator for the airline industry. During CAPA's Airlines in Transition 2014 Summit in Dublin earlier this year, airline strategist, **Nawal Taneja**, of the Department of Aviation at Ohio State University, said technology-based organisations such as Amazon would enable semantic research, which would in turn facilitate the ability to predict consumer behaviour based on the past. “Consumer-facing businesses can then offer a ‘highly sophisticated, personalised service’. This can be particularly powerful in tailoring solutions to individual travellers when

some aspect of their journey goes wrong. For example, a passenger arriving just too late at a departure gate could immediately be given information on an alternative flight and associated pricing.”

United Airlines collects and analyses data from customers to see what the most successful products are and then markets these. The airline looks at who the customer is and his or her propensity to buy certain products. More than 150 variables about that customer – prior purchases and previous destinations among them – are assessed in real time to determine an individual's likely actions.

Delta Air Lines last year equipped 19 000 flight attendants with Nokia Lumia 820 handheld devices and will replace these this year with Lumia 1520 phablets. **Theresa Wise**, senior vp and chief information officer, said: “The phablet is a great foundation for future software applications that, in time, will allow our flight attendants to readily access customer preferences, previous travel experiences with Delta and worldwide connectivity to the company, enabling them to provide the more tailored experience many customers have come to expect.”

KLM also uses data-driven evidence and knowledge

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Travel smart!

Fastjet has launched a premium service called ‘SmartClass’ on all its flights. It offers passengers advance premium seat allocation, increased baggage allowance of up to 32kg, and the ability to change flight dates as many times as required at no additional cost for a premium fare. The cost of the upgrade on international routes is US\$450 (R4 828) one way. For more on this service, see *TNW's* upcoming LCC feature. Taking advantage of the new offer is **Justin Glanville**, commercial manager in South Africa. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl.

Trafalgar taps into consumer content

DORINE REINSTEIN

TRAFALGAR has taken a bold step in what it calls “the evolution of guided holidays”,

by launching a new website that includes unedited consumer reviews.

The growing importance of

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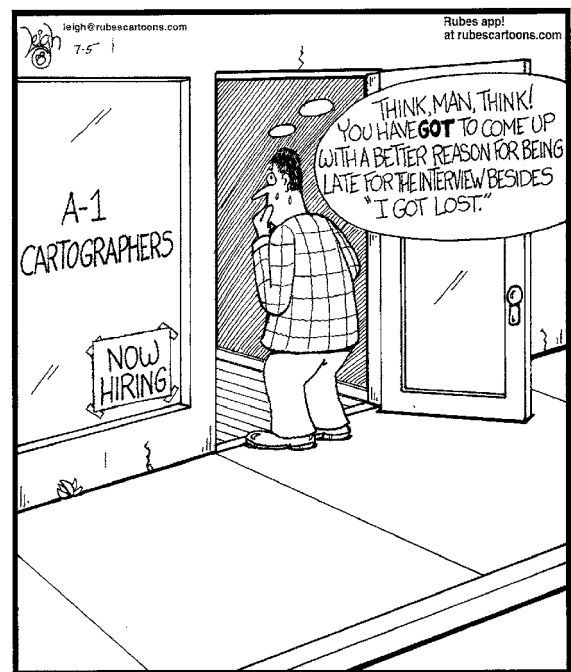
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Rubes® By Leigh Rubin



Emirates and Jetstar grow alliance

EMIRATES has expanded its codeshare and frequent flyer relationship with Jetstar to include 30 routes across the Asia-Pacific region, starting October 26.

Emirates will codeshare on Jetstar Airways' flights from Melbourne to Ayers Rock in Australia, and Christchurch to Wellington in New Zealand. New codeshare services from Singapore on Jetstar Asia will connect Emirates passengers

to Penang in Malaysia, Yangon in Myanmar and Medan in Indonesia.

Emirates passengers will receive all boarding cards at check-in for all connecting flights, provided the booking is on one PNR.

Skywards members can earn miles when booking economy starter plus, economy starter max or business max flights on international routes with Jetstar Airways, Jetstar Asia,

Jetstar Japan and Valair. Skywards miles can also be earned on Jetstar Airways' domestic routes in Australia and New Zealand if their domestic flights connect with international codeshare flights.

Members must enter their Emirates Skywards membership number when booking flights and the miles will automatically be credited within two weeks of completing their flights. ■

BON Hotels takes over West Coast resort

SHELLEY Point Hotel, Spa and Country Club on the Cape West Coast has avoided liquidation by being signed out of business rescue by hospitality company, BON Hotels, which has purchased the property.

"Shelley Point has a lot to offer across a broad market," says, **Guy Stehlik**, ceo of BON Hotels. "It has a nine-hole golf course, spa and wellness centre, three beautiful beaches on the estate, as well as bowling greens and

tennis courts, and a location 90 minutes from Cape Town, and we are excited to take up the challenge. Shelley Point is a perfect fit for the BON Hotels portfolio."

The 84-room hotel will be renamed BON Hotel Shelley Point and will be marketed as a resort.

The BON Hotels sales and marketing team believe the hotel will succeed if it focuses its marketing efforts on the corporate and conference sector during the week and

the family leisure market over the weekends and holiday periods. Upgrades are under way to cater for both these markets.

Immediate upgrades will include WiFi throughout the hotel, refurbishment of the bar area, improvements to the property management systems and the introduction of a shuttle service to the beach. Investigations are under way to create a West Coast beach-style restaurant close to the resort. ■

Trafalgar taps into consumer content

From page 1
review websites in the travel decision-making process has often been highlighted during the past year. US-based *Travel Weekly* recently ran a Consumer Trend Survey. The key findings were an increase in the use of review sites by travellers who use agents and the growing importance of review sites in travellers' decision-making.

Trafalgar is now tapping into this trend with the launch of its new website, which features user-generated content through independent client reviews. The reviews are posted without being edited in any way through feefo, a global ratings and reviews provider.

Theresa Szejwallo, md of Trafalgar, says: "We do have a full-time team in Geneva that only looks after guest reviews, so whether these are positive or negative they are handled immediately. Taking down negative comments would hurt our hard-won credibility and it is not something we will do. If we get a 'not so happy' review, it still goes on the website but we do contact

the guest to address the situation."

Theresa adds that this new and emerging 'sharing culture' allows agents to experience the destination without having been there. "It also allows them to show their clients third-party reviews of the product they're selling. We want to have more transparency so that our agents can hear from their clients what their Trafalgar experience was. You don't have to believe us - believe what our guests are saying about their Trafalgar experiences."

Travel agents will find feedback from a large demographic of Trafalgar travellers in the user reviews. Theresa says it is no longer the sole prerogative of the younger generation to share their experiences online. "Our statistics show that up to 70% of our Trafalgar guests post on social media. We have free WiFi on our coaches and we encourage our guests to use social media."

Besides adding user-generated reviews, Trafalgar has also merged its agent

and consumer sites, bringing agents a bigger range of tools to help them make a sale, says Theresa.

Each page features a search box where agents can search by country, see live trip ratings and more. Easy access to agents' bookings on their personal profile are also to be found as well as the ability to request brochures.

The site offers a live online booking system that is accessible 24 hours a day as well as an online payment system. Agents' online bookings can be accessed through the site, and the online booking system generates reminders of when payment is due and creates invoices for the agent.

There are also other touches, such as the live guest feedback and a wider range of trip types, including the new Hidden Journeys collection for smaller groups.

"We have a special 'what's new' section detailing the latest deals, offers and news as well as a great sales toolbox, agents-only offers and a 'request training' feature," adds Theresa. ■



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Go Team Chocolat!

After four gruelling days of physical and mental challenges in Réunion (pictured here, from left), Jenna Berndt (social media co-ordinator of Sure Travel), Johnathan Hollard (Flight Centre Benmore), and Tamarin Seymour (Gold Travel Counsellor) were announced winning team of the South African Mascarun, an initiative organised by the Réunion Island Tourism Board. The challenges saw 24 travel agents traverse the island in an effort to win the South African leg of the challenge, and the chance to return to Réunion and compete in the global Mascarun challenge in 2015. The competition was close, but the team nicknamed Team Chocolat were the undisputed champs in the end. More photos and details to follow in *TNW's* Adventure Tourism feature! Photo: Kate Els

Singapore Airlines offers pax more value

SOUTH African passengers flying with Singapore Airlines or SilkAir will receive a S\$40 (R360) Changi Dollar Voucher (CDV) when they transit through Changi Airport, as part of a joint promotion between Singapore Airlines and the Changi Airport Group.

The vouchers are offered as two S\$20 CDVs, one of which is valid for one-time use at retail, food and service outlets in the transit and public areas, excluding certain outlets; the second is valid for one-

time use to redeem liquor, tobacco, perfume or cosmetic purchases.

Qualifying passengers' e-tickets must be issued on Singapore Airlines ticket number and they must be travelling on flights operated by Singapore Airlines or SilkAir both in and out of Singapore.

CDVs can only be claimed once on either leg of the passenger's itinerary. For example, if someone is travelling through Singapore from Johannesburg to Sydney,

they can claim their S\$40 CDVs either on arrival in Singapore from Johannesburg or on arrival in Singapore from Sydney.

To redeem the CDVs, passengers in transit can visit the iShopChangi Collection Centres and present their passport, boarding passes and e-ticket, showing their full itinerary.

The CDVs are effective for transit passengers with travel dates from October 1 to March 31. ■

For the record

In *TNW* September 24 in the South East Asia feature on page 8, *TNW* incorrectly stated the amount of the Changi Dollar Vouchers was S\$340 (R2 996). *TNW* apologises for the error.

New Kruger safari resort still going ahead

PLANS for the construction of a new safari resort near Malelane Gate in the Kruger are not "off the cards" the developer and SANParks have confirmed. Recent reports suggested that the project had been suspended after the deadline for an application to the Department of Environmental Affairs was missed. However, Peter Wright, ceo: Malelane Safari Resort Investments; and SANParks managing executive: tourism development & marketing, Glenn Phillips, have said the project is still going ahead. Peter said, while the deadline for the submission of an application to DEA did lapse, another application had already been submitted and the company was expecting a response soon. He said a decision had been taken to submit a new application.

Graceland Hotel completes upgrades

THE first phase of the R10-million refurbishment project at Peermont's Graceland Hotel Casino and Country Club in Secunda has been completed. Refurbishments have been done on two floors of the four-star Walmont Hotel and the Privé-style Manhattan lounge at a cost of R5,5 million. The two Walmont floors have received new carpets and wallpapers and the Manhattan Casino bathroom facilities have had a complete makeover. The second phase is under way and scheduled for completion at the end of this month. This will include the addition of the new Madison's Bistro and family restaurant with a dedicated children's entertainment area.

Starwood introduces Westin to Mauritius

STARWOOD Hotels and Resorts has launched its Westin brand in Mauritius with the recent opening of The Westin Turtle Bay Resort & Spa. The resort will feature 190 guest rooms, including 38 suites. Five dining venues, including an all-day dining restaurant, two speciality restaurants, a pool restaurant and bar, as well as a lobby lounge, will be available to guests. Event space includes a ballroom, two meeting rooms and a business centre. The resort is located in Turtle Bay in Balaclava on the north-west coast of Mauritius.

New Seychelles hotel opens for bookings

THE Eden Blue, a new hotel in the Seychelles, has opened for bookings and will open to guests on November 1. The hotel is located on Eden Island, near the capital, Victoria. Room types include 74 deluxe rooms, 12 luxury suites and a presidential suite. All the rooms have a workstation with international plug sockets, a mini-bar fridge, bathroom, a separate shower, lounge area and 24-hour room service. Adjacent to the hotel is Eden Plaza, a purpose-built retail centre that houses shops, boutiques, diving and boat charters as well as banking and medical facilities. WiFi will enable guests to make use of in-room Apple TV systems to play music, videos and other material on their TV screens. An interactive digital concierge can be downloaded to a smartphone or mobile device before arrival, which will provide guests with all hotel services, island activities and any information they need.

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SAA signs up for Travelport Rich Content

SAA will become the first airline in Africa to sign up for Travelport's Rich Content and Branding technology.

The technology enables airlines to more effectively control how their fares are visually presented and described on travel agency screens. Now in final testing and due to be launched later in the year on Travelport

Smartpoint agency desktops, Rich Content and Branding allows travel agents to access photos, images and extended descriptions to better inform their customers on fares, including cabin type, seat type, meals, baggage allowance and ticket flexibility.

More than 60 airlines have signed up for the technology, including, Delta, Ryanair, British Airways, Iberia, easyJet, Hainan

Airlines and United Airlines.

"SAA continues to expand its range of dynamic travel products tailored towards our increasingly sophisticated customers and we are pleased that the merchandising technology offered through Travelport's Travel Commerce Platform enables us to differentiate ourselves more easily," said **Sylvain Bosc**, coo of SAA. ■

Thompsons Travel goes online

THOMPSONS Travel has launched its new website and blog for customers across the Thompsons Travel Corporate, Thompsons Travel Leisure and Thompsons Meetings and Incentives brands.

The website will provide customers with a range of holiday packages, client testimonials and services offered. The blog will feature travel advice, destination news

and product updates.

New business manager at Thompsons Travel, **Hayley Walls**, says: "In this socially connected world, we also realise the importance of becoming more social across a range of social media platforms. We would like to create an informative, interactive and fun experience for our customers to engage with us. Visitors to our blog

can look forward to interesting posts with a diverse range of travel themes each week, with each of our divisions getting the opportunity to provide the story lines on a rotational basis."

Thompsons Travel has also launched a new wellness brand, offering corporates experiences and travel packages to help de-stress staff who are overworked. ■

Flyafrika launches JNB-Harare flights

FLYAFRICA.COM will launch daily flights between Harare and Johannesburg from November 1. Sales have opened, with fares starting from R399 one way, excluding airport taxes of around R999.

"Today's announcement is another milestone both for our airline and for developing

business in Africa," says **Adrian Hamilton-Manns**, group ceo of flyafrika.com.

"Business and leisure travellers have paid too much for too long to travel between Harare and Johannesburg. Our fare of R399, compared with the R1 660 offered by our competitors, shows

flyafrika.com's commitment to bringing low fares to Africa. Our daily HRE-JNB flight marks our entry into a traditional business route and we are confident that businesses will welcome the opportunity to reduce travel costs by 80%." The airline also operates a VFA-JNB service. ■

To the point



Condor is to increase its seasonal flights between Cape Town and Frankfurt. Flights will increase from twice to three times a week, from November 6. In addition to the Tuesday and Saturday flights, the airline will operate a third flight on Thursdays. Condor also recently refurbished its fleet. Refer to Travelinfo for more details.

AirHeads



A snapshot of the week's airline news

EK adds European destinations

EMIRATES has launched new daily services to Brussels and Oslo. Both routes are operated by a Boeing 777-200LR. The Brussels flight departs Dubai at 07h50 and arrives at Brussels International Airport at 13h15. The return flight departs at 14h45 and arrives at Dubai International Airport at 23h25. The Oslo flight departs Dubai at 07h00 and arrives at Oslo Airport, Gardermoen, at 12h10. The return flight departs at 13h55 and arrives at Dubai International Airport at 22h50. Emirates will expand its European portfolio further with the launch of Budapest on October 27.

EY goes double-daily to Karachi

ETIHAD Airways will add a new daily flight between Abu Dhabi and Karachi to offer a double-daily service from November 18. The first flight will depart Abu Dhabi at 16h00 and arrive in Karachi at 19h20. The return flight departs Karachi at 22h00 and arrives in Abu Dhabi at 23h35. The second daily flight will depart Abu Dhabi at 23h15 and arrive in Karachi at 02h25, with the return flight departing Karachi at 05h25 and arriving in Abu Dhabi at 07h00. The additional service will be operated by a 136-seat Airbus A320 with 120 seats in economy class and 16 seats in business class. The extra flight will add 1 904 seats a week on the route.

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Airlink moving to King Mswati III International Airport on 30 September 2014.

Airlink, in collaboration with Swaziland Airlink, will be offering convenient daily flights between Johannesburg and the new Swaziland King Mswati III International Airport (Sikhuphe). Facilities at Sikhuphe include VIP lounge, quick boarding and disembarking from the aircraft, and car hire. Visit www.flyairlink.com



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Have you got what it takes?

Asata recently polled over 100 travel agents, mostly corporate, to find out what it takes to be a travel agent in the 21st century. Dorine Reinstein reports.

THE future success of travel agents lies in their ability to foster customer relationships. Agents who participated in a recent Asata survey, highlighted this as the most important 'non-negotiable' skill for 21st century travel agents. A close second in the top-five non-negotiable skills was being a great communicator, followed by the ability to multitask, being personable and having expert destination knowledge.

Otto de Vries, Asata ceo, says: "This has become a consumer-driven industry. The customer is savvy and informed. Our role has changed and has to be clearly defined and promoted to show the value proposition for a customer when engaging a professional travel agent."

The days of travel agents' fear of the Internet appear to have passed. Over half of respondents say they "couldn't work without" the Internet and 42% say it enhances their skills.

Travel agents confirm that they use the Internet to find destination information, accommodation reviews and read up on travel news and trends. They do, however, recognise the potential for customers to go online and book their travel, with over 60% saying their top priority must be to become travel experts and convince customers that they're better than the Internet.

TNW approached travel industry leaders to gauge their opinion on what it takes to be a 21st century travel agent.

eTravel ceo, **Garth Wolff**, says for him, communication is indeed the one non-negotiable skill a travel agent of the future needs to have. "Travellers want instant information and a professional ITC needs to use the web to beat the web by knowing everything that the Internet can offer but be able to deliver the info in a personal and professional way. It then all boils down to exceptional communication skills!"

Not all agents agree with the top-five attributes that Asata came up with. "Of course, all the skills listed in the Asata survey are a very important part of doing business. I do think, however, that travel agents need to realise that those skills are not 'special' any more. They

are foundation level skills that should be part of doing business every day," says **Rachael Penaluna**, business manager at Sure Maritime Travel.

According to Rachael, to make it in the 21st century, travel agents need to have a better understanding of how their business works and how much it has changed in the last 10 years.

"Travel managers need to be business-minded and pass that message on to their clients. For example, bill-backs on any service are bad for business. They reduce cash flow and maximise risk. Do your clients understand how the lara bonding process works? The more 'liable' an agency is, the higher its bond will be. More often than not, when you explain it to a client, who



"This has become a consumer-driven industry. The customer is savvy and informed."
Otto de Vries.

is also managing cash flow and risk in their own business – they will respect you more and come to the party."

For **Rian Bornman**, md of Flight Site, adaptability

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is a key attribute for any future travel agent. “To justify a fee, today’s travel agent needs to adapt to customers’ requirements and, like Google, know what customers want before they do. Imagine if agents used the business intelligence, now readily available in all forms of data generated on a daily basis, to learn what a customer’s expectations were and then offered a bespoke travel product to them, before they asked. This is what will differentiate agents in future.”

Wally Gaynor, Club Travel md, agrees with Rian and says one of the most important skills a travel agent of the future needs to have is the ability to source and recommend suppliers and products that offer exceptional



“You need a combination of skills, but without passion, you won’t succeed.”

Sean Hough

value and customer experience.

Franz Von Wielligh, Flight Specials gm, feels that travel agents need to become solution advisers, both for the corporate and leisure client. Therefore,

Franz highlights emotional intelligence as the one non-negotiable skill. “We have to understand in what emotional state our clients are when they are making their purchasing decision. We need to have the empathy to relate to the circumstances, but also have a sober mind in determining their specific needs and marry the appropriate product to them.”

Rod Rutter, coo of XL Travel, agrees that, although all the skills mentioned in the Asata survey are important, the one non-negotiable skill for the agent of the future is to thoroughly understand the personality and requirements of the client. He adds that the use of technology can also not be underestimated



“It then all boils down to exceptional communication skills!”

Garth Wolff

in the 21st century and agents should not become complacent when it comes to innovating and joining the mobile revolution. “Our times are changing fast and we need to change.”

For **Sean Hough**, ceo of Pentravel, it’s more

about values than skills. “Different people have different strengths and it’s difficult to say that if you are more charming you will be more successful than an individual who focuses on efficiency. You need a combination of skills to be successful, but without passion, you won’t succeed.”

Geraldine Boshoff, marketing manager for Sure Travel, agrees and says the industry needs to employ people with talent. “Talented people are those individuals who will learn anything to succeed and have the ability to embrace change. I see the 21st-century travel adviser as a person who will consult with a client, corporate or leisure, in such a unique way that they are in awe of the buying experience.” ■



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Apps that make the travel agent's life easier

DORINE REINSTEIN

THERE has been an explosion of new apps over the past few years that can help travellers with anything from boarding a flight to hailing a cab to finding the perfect restaurant at their destination. As travel, by definition, is mobile, it's only natural for app developers to target this market.

For travel agents too, a number of new apps came on the market in 2014 that could make their life a little easier. *TNW* has listed four of this year's must-try apps for travel agents.

1. Refund.Me

Calculating how much compensation your client is entitled to when he is stranded on holiday can be a daunting task for any travel agent. Luckily, now there is an app to help.

Refund.me, the international passenger rights specialist, has now released a new app for travel agents. The app, which is available to travel agents via the Sabre Red App Centre, will automatically monitor thousands of bookings and detect delays and cancellations eligible for compensation of up to US\$800 (R8 897) according to EU law. It will automatically alert agents when a flight they have booked becomes eligible for compensation. The app works for all flights outbound from Europe, regardless of destination.

It also covers flights from South Africa to Europe if operated by an EU carrier.

Eve Buechner, founder and ceo of refund.me, said: "This app is designed to ensure passengers are given the opportunity to claim their compensation. The straightforward monitoring and alert system we are offering travel agents will go a long way to increasing awareness of passenger rights. It is the first step in simplifying what is often an unnecessarily difficult process."

2. mTrip Travel Guides

mTrip has been chosen as an Innovator for the PhoCusWright conference in Los Angeles in November. The company is expected to present its new app for travel agents, mTrip Travel Guides, at the conference.

The new app offers a mobile white label offline solution for travel agencies to improve customer satisfaction, visibility and relationships with their customers. Travel agents can send their customers an invitation to download a travel agency-branded application for their iPhone or Android instead of the traditional paper printout.

Upon opening the app, customers will have access to their entire trip, starting with a trip overview. The overview includes detailed trip information, including their transportation and accommodation details, travel documents, a full destination guide for each stop on their trip, offline

maps and navigation and other important information to help them.

3. TripScope

TripScope is a new travel app dedicated to helping travel agents retail more effectively via dynamic itinerary sharing with customers.

It allows travel agents to create customised itineraries online. Through the agent website, they can send these itineraries directly to their clients' smartphones for them to view all their travel information. Travel agents can change the itinerary in real time and send their clients updates, chat with them directly and help them get the most out of their travel experience.

4. Travelpoint Mobile Agent

Travelpoint Mobile Agent provides quick and easy access to the GDS for agents. The app is not new but the latest revamped version was released on July 30.

The latest version (3.0) uses touch interaction to offer travel agents a faster and easy mobile GDS terminal. New tools include Custom Quick Keys, Double Window as well as Latest PNRs, which is a quick shortcut to access the latest PNRs created, opened or changed.

TTS has also introduced the new TTS Web Agent, bringing the full features of Travelpoint Mobile Agent 3.0 to desktops. ■



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United Kingdom



Save 25% with BritRail Guest Pass

TERRI-ANN Wright, manager of World Travel, gsa for UK and Europe rail companies in South Africa, offers some need-to-know information about the BritRail Guest Pass and family discounts.

The pass offers international travellers and their British resident travel companion a 25% discount on the adult fare in first and standard class. The UK passenger must travel with the pass holder at all times and provide proof of residence on request.

Conditions of use and refund policies are the same as for the BritRail Pass and BritRail England Pass. The BritRail Guest Pass is not available with the Party Pass and Family Pass formulas, or with senior and youth fares.

Family discounts are available in first and second class and apply to regular and off-peak BritRail and BritRail England Consecutive and Flexi passes. Children up to age four can travel free as long as they travel with a parent.

One child, aged five to 15 years, can travel free on the first travel day when accompanied by an adult or senior. Additional children pay the regular price of half the adult fare.

Expensive visas and the poor exchange rate have made visitors rethink visits to the UK. Max Marx reports.

Demand for leisure travel drops

SEVERAL South African tour operators have reported static or declining demand for leisure travel to the UK, while others report a change in travel patterns.

Megan D'Arcy, Comair Travel product manager for Europe, USA, cruising and tourism, says Holiday Tours has not seen much of an uptake from the leisure market to the UK.

"The reason for this is a combination of the costly visa, the extremely high rate of exchange, and VFR traffic, which impacts negatively on the leisure market as it does not rely on the trade to organise accommodation or sightseeing trips."

Megan says Holiday Tours has also seen a drop in combo-holidays. "In the past, passengers combined London with a second destination in Europe. They are now bypassing the UK and travelling directly to Europe on carriers that do not go via London to avoid

having to get an additional visa for the UK, even when just in transit."

Susan Thesen, British T.I.P.S gm, also reports a drop in visitor numbers to the UK, for similar reasons. She says it's mostly high-end and corporate travellers who are visiting Britain these days.

Linda Steenekamp, XL Rosebank Travel gm, has found that passengers don't want to pay for a UK visa as well as a Schengen visa, so people are just avoiding the UK and travelling straight to Europe.

To avoid South Africans having to get a UK visa, Trafalgar has remodelled its itineraries, allowing passengers the option to start their European tours in continental Europe, says **Theresa Szejwallo**, Trafalgar md. "The uptake of this has been phenomenal and is one small way in which we can help our guests get the most out of their guided holidays without unnecessary

expenses," she said.

Angela Wood, Thompsons Holidays gm: marketing, says passenger numbers to the UK this year have remained similar to last year, while room nights booked have increased.

Thompson's has seen an increase in demand for UK packages rather than London stopovers.

"The UK visitor visa is expensive, which has meant a drop in stopover and UK/Europe combination packages but has resulted in greater popularity in our longer-stay UK/Ireland packages that offer something different."

Terri-Ann Wright, manager of World Travel, gsa for UK and Europe rail companies in South Africa, reports a decline in demand for rail tickets in the UK and Europe.

"We believe this is mainly due to the weakening of the South African rand," she says.


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'A glimmer of hope' – VisitBritain

DESPITE South African Airways and several tour operators reporting a decline in UK-bound travellers, statistics provided by VisitBritain show that while the number of visits declined from 2008 to 2011, things started to turn around in 2012.

In 2008, visits to the UK from South Africa stood at 274 000. From 2008 to the end of 2011 these visits dropped by 29% to 194 000. This can be attributed to several factors – the volatile rand, the global economic crisis, the introduction of UK visas for South Africans in March 2009, and South Africa's hosting of 2010 FIFA World Cup, which took place during the European summer.

VisitBritain statistics show that visits to the UK started to increase in 2012, when 211 000 visits from South Africa were recorded – a 9% increase over 2011 figures. The growth continued through 2013.

Keith Beecham, interim ceo at VisitBritain, said despite the rand suffering a tough 2013, visits to Britain from South Africa last year were the highest since 2010, although not quite back to pre-economic-crisis levels.

"This means visits in 2013 were 7% up on 2012 and 16,5% up on 2011. We've also seen an increase in spending, with the largest amount spent – £222 million (R4bn) – since 2009, representing a spike of 11% on 2012 and 30,5% more than in 2011," he commented.

Although 2014 Q1 statistics revealed a 25% drop in visits to Britain compared with Q1 in 2013, VisitBritain pointed out that Q1 stats alone were not a reliable indicator as the period was not the key tourism



Simon Newton-Smith

season for this market. Data gauging whether rand volatility this year has had an impact on UK visits will only become available later this year.

Statistics from the UK Civil Aviation Authority show total passenger numbers travelling between London and Cape Town (in both directions) declined almost 32% from 2008 to 2013, while traffic between Johannesburg and London (both directions) declined just 3,1%, from 944 731 passengers in 2008 to 915 238 passengers in 2013.

Simon Newton-Smith, Virgin Atlantic Airways head of Middle East and Africa, said it was difficult to say to what extent this decline was attributable to the introduction of the UK visa, as it coincided with the global economic crisis. "We do know from a visa perspective that passengers to Europe, who would normally have travelled there via London, have just avoided the UK completely, which will have contributed to a reduction in traffic."

As recently reported in *TNW*, Virgin Atlantic will withdraw its Cape Town services from April 28 next year, with the last service from London operating on April 27. The withdrawal of the service, said Simon, had not been an easy decision but was the right business one.

"We've got an underlying market that is shrinking and we need to find ways to grow it," he said, adding that capacity on both the Johannesburg-London and Cape Town-London routes during South Africa's spring and summer seasons would be similar to that of last year.

And while SAA has reduced capacity on its Johannesburg-London route – a reduction of 23 000 seats per annum – which according to SAA spokesperson, **Tlali Tlali**, is due to "a decline in demand on the South Africa-UK route over the past five years" – British Airways increased capacity on the route in February with the introduction of the 469-seat A380 on five of its double-daily services between the destinations.

BA also increased the number of direct services to Cape Town over the South African winter, upping these from daily to 10 a week.

Tlali says the weak rand and the high cost of the UK visa for South Africans are the major contributors of declining passenger numbers to the UK on SAA. "High airport taxes and security charges at London Heathrow are also a major contributor to the cost of an air ticket," he said.

He added that SAA would not be changing frequencies in the current season, which ends on October 28 but that aircraft capacity would be adjusted according to demand.

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Visits from SA to the UK – 2008 to 2014 Q1

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2013 Q1	2014 Q1
Total visits SA to UK	274 000	245 000	208 000	194 000	211 000	226 000	48 000	36 000
% change		-10,6%	-15,1%	-6,7%	8,8%	7,1%		-25%
Total nights (000)	3 942	4 745	2 564	2 316	2 633	2 899	854	380
Total spend (£m)	220	222	182	170	200	222	50	32

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High Commission addresses agents' UK visa complaints

TRAVEL agents and their clients continue to complain about the UK visa process – in terms of filling out the UK application form and in their dealings with Teleperformance, the company appointed to operate the UK visa application centres in South Africa since April 1 this year.

TNW put the complaints to **Isabel Potgieter**, spokesperson for the British High Commission, and **Henry Nedambale**, Teleperformance Contact regional manager: SA.

Agents and their clients are extremely upset at having to pay £1,37 (R24,50) a minute to get information on UK visas. They're sometimes kept on hold by call centre agents and say the information is not always accurate. Most agents are under the impression that Teleperformance operates the call centre.

The telephone information service is not provided by Teleperformance, says Isabel. "From April 1, 2014, UK Visas & Immigration introduced a single international enquiry service for its overseas customers, provided by our commercial partner, Hinduja Global Solutions. This offers an improved service to visa customers in 20 languages and introduced a standard charge for all, regardless of country of residence. Advisers have been trained to provide a quick, accurate and professional service with help available to them throughout the application process."

Is there any other way they can get information on UK visas without having to pay for it?

Customers who don't want to pay for the telephone information service, says

Isabel, can use the improved www.gov.uk website to access all relevant information about the visa process. "If they need to contact us they can use the international enquiry service via email, which is free."

The visa application form is not user-friendly, is time-consuming to fill in and often bombs out, meaning clients have to start all over again.

Upgrades were made to the online application form and process in November 2013, with new features enabling customers to make and access applications more quickly and easily. The Visa4UK website experienced unprecedented activity in March this year, resulting in restrictions being placed on the number of concurrent users. These restrictions were subsequently lifted following a significant increase in service capacity. The www.gov.uk website is now also far more user-friendly for those seeking immigration information.

Why does it take 15 working days for Teleperformance to return a visa?

Turnaround of applications is driven by demand and UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) capacity rather than influenced by Teleperformance, says Isabel. "Our published customer service standard globally is to resolve all short-term visa applications within 15 working days of submission at the Visa Application Centre. During less busy periods, processing times in SA are often significantly less."

With Teleperformance's visa tracking system agents say it's impossible to find out where in the process their clients' visas are and say they are not notified when the visa is ready.

Henry acknowledges significant teething problems in the first two months of Teleperformance's operations in South Africa. "The tracking system wasn't working and clients were unable to receive emails. These teething problems have now been sorted out and for the past six weeks the system has been working 100%. Clients are able to track their applications on the Teleperformance Contact website (www.ge2za.tpcontact.co.uk), receive emails notifying them that their application has been forwarded to the British High Commission, and when their documents are available for collection."

Staff in Teleperformance's application centres are rude and not customer-service orientated.

"We welcome feedback from travel agents and our clients on Teleperformance's service so that we can continually improve our offering. Feedback from a recent Teleperformance customer survey at all five of our UK visa application centres in South Africa indicated that almost 97% of respondents were satisfied with the attitude and support of our staff. We will continue to work to exceed our customers' expectations. "If anyone has an issue or complaint or wants to correspond with us, they can reach us through the www.get2za.tpcontact.co.uk website, where there is an email form under the Feedback and Complaints tab. If applicants wish to speak to a call centre agent they can dial +27 (0)21 300 3758 or 00 44 124321 8173 (this is a pay service)."

How long does an expedited visa take?

"Our priority visa service for fast tracking the application generally sees the application returned within five working days. This processing time is however not guaranteed," says Isabel.

Agents say the UK visa is expensive and want to know why there's a cost differential between a six-month (R1 536) and 10-year (R13 635) visa.

"We recognise the importance of the visitor route to the UK economy," says Isabel. "That is why our government has sought to bear down the fee for short-term visit visas. The fee for a six-month multiple-entry visitor visa is significantly below the cost to the Home Office of processing the application, and remains competitive. Applicants for a long-term visa benefit from not having to make multiple visa applications each time they want to come to the UK. They also allow regular travellers to the UK to hedge against possible future visa fee increases or changes to eligibility."

Why do transit passengers need a UK visa?

South African nationals are able to journey via the UK without first obtaining a transit visa where they are travelling on to the US, Canada, Australia or New Zealand and hold a valid visa for the respective country, and where they will transit out of the UK within 24 hours of arrival. "The 2014 visa fee review saw a reduction of almost 30% in the price of a direct airside transit visa, along with a freezing of the landside transit fee. We believe this will help to enhance the UK's position as a hub for transiting passengers," says Isabel.

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The London Eye. Photo: Pixabay

British T.I.P.S offers good-value London packages

BRITISH T.I.P.S is offering a good-value package at the four-star Regency Hotel in London.

The package is from R4 770pps and includes three nights' B&B twin-share accommodation, private transfers from London Heathrow on arrival, and an Oyster Card preloaded with £20 (R359). The package is valid for travel from December 14-26, 2014, and January 1-February 28, 2015. Additional nights can be added at R1 845pps per night.

For first-time travellers, British T.I.P.S' London

Sightseeing Value Pack and Views of London packages offer good value for money.

The London Sightseeing Value Pack at R2 050 includes an open-top sightseeing bus tour, Thames cruise, London walking tour, fast-track tickets to Madame Tussaud's and the Tower of London, and a ride on the London Eye.

The Views of London sightseeing package for R1 840 includes the open-bus sightseeing tour, Thames cruise, London walking tour, London Eye, and view from the Shard.

United Kingdom



Thompsons Holidays UK options

- Thompsons Holidays offers a seven-night 'Flavours of England' package from R28 788 ex-JNB (including taxes) with return JNB-London flights on Emirates. Valid until December 12, it includes two nights' four-star London accommodation with hop-on, hop-off sightseeing bus tour, a Thames river cruise and guided walking

- tour; two nights' three-star accommodation in York with hop-on, hop-off sightseeing tour; and three nights' four-star accommodation in Edinburgh with hop-on, hop-off sightseeing tour plus a full-day Loch Lomond, Trossachs and Stirling Castle tour.

- Five nights' three-star B&B accommodation at the three-star Tavistock Hotel

in London from R16 609 ex-JNB on Emirates (including taxes). Valid until October 31.

- Nine-night 'Shakespeare's Country & Celtic Wales' package, valid until December 12 from R27 719 ex-JNB (including taxes) on Emirates. Includes a night in London and two nights each in Cardiff, Bath and Leamington Spa.

New UK packages from Holiday Tours

HOLIDAY Tours has two great UK packages on offer.

- 'A Hard Day's Night in London' package, valid for travel from December 1-15, from R8 281pps (land only) includes four nights' accommodation at London's Chrysol Hotel, a half-day Classic Rock Legends & Beatles sites tour; a Beatles walking tour and a meal at the Hard Rock Café.

- 'Best of British Rail Tour' – valid for travel until November 30 – from R19 899pps (land only) includes eight nights' accommodation in three-star hotels; rail tickets between cities as per itinerary; a hop-on, hop-off sightseeing tour, Thames cruise and guided walking tour in London; a full-day tour of Stonehenge, Cotswolds villages and the

Harry Potter film location of Lacock village in Bath; a Magical Mystery Beatles bus tour in Liverpool; a Beatrix Potter Lakeland and Wordsworth tour in Windermere; a full-day tour to Loch Ness, Glencoe and the Highlands from Glasgow; and a hop-on, hop-off sightseeing tour of Edinburgh. The package includes breakfast daily. ■



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How to 'inspect' venues you can't visit

How can you ensure a prospective venue meets your requirements when you can't get on site to conduct an inspection? *TNW's* sister publication, *Meet*, spoke to **Megan Buchanan** of Event Affairs to find out.

YOU'VE found a prospective venue for an upcoming conference in another city. There's just one problem: the venue is far and a site inspection impossible. Not being able to physically walk through the premises to dot the i's and cross the t's, you're left to rely on your instincts.

"Technology can help," says Megan. "While there might not be any online review sites to guide decision making, most venues offer websites that give a fair idea of what they have to offer." But, she warns, websites should never be the determining factor in the decision-making process. "What you see is not necessarily what you get. It's a good idea to consult social media and see what kind of presence they have and what their interaction on the forum is like."

Another way of determining

if a venue suits your needs is by taking its star-rating into consideration, says Megan. "For example if you are looking for a high-end venue then you will immediately know that a three-star is not going to meet your needs. It is all about getting a good feel for the venue whether it's through the website, their social media presence or other avenues such as unbiased write-ups or HelloPeter reports."

She also advises speaking to others who have used the venue before. "This could be tricky if a venue is far out and no one in your immediate network has used it before, but put your feelers out using your own social media, chat to colleagues – you never know who might live in the area in question."

Communicate clearly

Most reputable, professionally run venues have a banqueting

or events manager who should have all the necessary information and answers to questions. "A phone discussion with an events manager will give you a good idea of whether they are professional, knowledgeable, helpful and confident in their offerings. If you have any doubts, then walk away or try and find someone to have a look at the venue for you," she advises. "If you get a good feeling for what they have on offer, put everything in an email to the relevant person so it's in writing. Ensure you get feedback from the responsible person and keep communication gates open at all times."

Keep a checklist

"Don't take anything for granted," says Megan. "Make sure you have a checklist and that every item on it is ticked prior to your event."



"What you see is not necessarily what you get. It's a good idea to consult social media."

This would include basics such as whether the venue provides enough cutlery, crockery, chairs and tables, and its ability to cater for specific dietary requirements, and if there are adequate parking and technical facilities available.

"In the case of an event taking place at an unknown, far-out venue, the event organiser would need to have the entire event scripted out in a checklist," says Megan. "If at any stage, there are more than a few items not getting sorted out or with which they are unable to assist, then it's best to look elsewhere. Also, if the venue has not undertaken a similar event before, it may be too risky to use it, particularly if you are unable to see the venue before the major planning takes place."

Megan says online review sites would be highly beneficial in helping organisers make informed decisions. "The most important factor would be reviewers with some clout in the industry," she says. "Just as helpful would be a virtual tour of the facilities, allowing an organiser to see exactly what is on offer." ■

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Obituary

Hotel industry mourns Fred Gottgens

FRED Gottgens, South Africa's first registered hotelier and the person responsible for introducing and starting the Holiday Inn hotel chain in SA, died aged 83 on September 19, after a long battle with cancer.

Born on August 18, 1931, Fred came from a family of successful hoteliers and leaves behind a legacy that revolutionised the South African hotel industry into what it is today.

In 1951 Fred completed his hotel training at École Hôtelière Lausanne, Switzerland, followed by an apprenticeship at various renowned hotels in Switzerland and the Royal Automobile Club in London.

Returning to SA in 1955, he joined the Edward Hotel in Durban as a reservations clerk. In 1961 he held his

first managerial position at the Riviera On Vaal hotel in Vereeniging and six months later he became the general manager at the Marine Hotel in Sea Point. When the Marine Hotel burned down in the latter part of 1962, Fred returned to the Edward Hotel as general manager.

In 1966 the Hotel Act came into law in South Africa, requiring hotels to be registered. "I have Fedhasa certificate number one, in his name, as the first five-star hotelier in South Africa, proudly on my office wall," said **Pete Gottgens**, Fred's son and fourth-generation hotelier.

In 1967 Fred went to America where he got the licence to bring the Holiday Inn hotel chain to South Africa. A year later he became operations director

for Holiday Inn Southern Africa and in 1982 developed Inn on the Square from an office block in Greenmarket Square, Cape Town. Fred also suggested the idea of a flea market at Greenmarket Square, which still runs today as a popular tourist attraction.

Fred lived in Simon's Town since 2000 and was retired at the time of his death. "He retired a few times. After Holiday Inn he retired then his retirement project became Inn On The Square until he had another idea. At one stage he had five Mike's Kitchens," said Pete.

Fred leaves his second wife, Bydie, son Pete and daughter Kate and two stepsons, Grant and Andrew. A funeral service was held on Friday, September 26, at St Francis Church in Simon's Town.

Save the date

BOOKINGS are open for the Travel Industry Charity Event's (TICE) 10th anniversary celebration on October 11 in Cape Town. The event will be held at the Cape Town International Convention Centre with entertainment by the Jonny Cooper Big

Band and Aviva Pelham's performance, 'Viva The Voices'.

This year's charity beneficiary, Molo Songololo, was selected by Cape Town Tourism. Molo Songololo was established in 1979 and since then has been

promoting the rights and protection of all children, particularly those affected by sexual exploitation and child trafficking. The theme of the evening is 'Denim and Diamonds'. For more info, contact Larry: tice.capetown@gmail.com or 021 551 5500.

Appointments

Doug Cairns

is the newly appointed marketing director at Cruises International. Doug began his career in industrial relations and has also worked across B2B and B2C sales and marketing environments in strategic and operational roles. **George Argyropoulos** and the team at Cruises International say: "Welcome aboard, Doug."



Ian Jones

has joined the Extrabold team as new group director, operations, where he will be responsible for operations at Extrabold's eight properties, including the Holiday Inn Sandton and Crowne Plaza Johannesburg – The Rosebank.



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TRAVEL INFO +PLUS

Mango posts record profits

IT'S been a good year for Mango and Comair, with both recording profits for the 2014 financial year.

Mango reported a nett profit of R40m and a before-tax profit of R56,1m for the fiscal ending March 31, 2014, its highest-ever profit, compared with a before-tax profit of R36,9m for the previous financial year. Revenue increased by 42% as a result of capacity growth of 25,62%, an average load factor of 82,35% and tightened yield management.

Meanwhile, Comair reported a 16% increase in nett income from last year to R265m, for the period ending June 30, 2014. Turnover grew 17% on improved yields and an increase in passenger numbers in one quarter.

"It has been a fantastic year for Mango," said ceo, **Nico Bezuidenhout**. "The narrative of our business case, as set down in 2006, continues to bear fruit as Mango achieves its second successive profitable fiscal and sixth profitable full fiscal out of seven completed."

However, Nico cautioned: "This year will see greater challenges and increased pressure on margins and with a new market entrant on the horizon, both load factors and revenue across the sector will be under pressure."

During the period in review, Mango launched scheduled twice-weekly JNB-Zanzibar flights, thrice weekly frequencies between JNB and George, plus a fourth in early 2014, and added two B737-800s to its fleet. ■

Politics lead to Air Uganda's demise

CHANA BOUCHER

AFTER months of being grounded, Air Uganda has announced that it will not be resuming operations, signalling the end of its time in Africa's skies.

The airline's flights were first suspended in June by the Ugandan Civil Aviation Authority, which said the carrier needed to reapply for its Air Operator Certificate before it could resume flights. Now, however, more than three months later, a spokesperson for the airline, **Rod Murphy**, told TNW that Air Uganda's shareholder (the Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development) had "had enough of African politics".

According to a statement by **Cornwell Muleya**, ceo of Air Uganda, an International Civil Aviation Organization audit revealed shortcomings in the CAA's oversight and regulatory capacity, which resulted in the organisation withdrawing

AOCs for all international commercial air operators registered in Uganda. He said this required the airline to cease operations and incur "massive financial losses on a daily basis".

Further, he said the airline's aircraft lease agreements required the airline to continue flying for the aircraft to remain on lease to Air Uganda. "The extended period of the aircraft remaining grounded has thus, sadly, triggered these covenants and Air Uganda is now contractually obligated to return the aircraft to the lessors' chosen facility abroad," Cornwell added. According to media reports, the aircraft were transported to Paris in August.

Meanwhile, airlines outside Uganda have benefited from the suspension of Air Uganda's flights. Kenya-based *East African* reports that, to counter skyrocketing prices out of Entebbe, the CAA granted fifth freedom rights

to Rwandair and Ethiopian Airlines for flights to Juba and Kenya Airways was allowed unlimited frequencies on the Entebbe-Nairobi route.

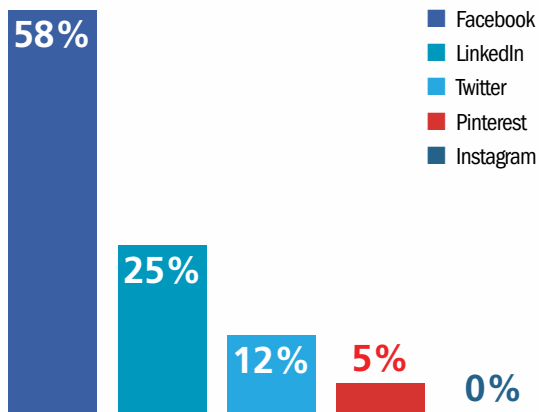
Fastjet launched flights between Dar es Salaam and Entebbe in September. When announcing the new service it said fares offered by other carriers for flights into and out of Uganda had steadily risen since Air Uganda ceased flying. It said it was confident that it had a strong competitive advantage as it was the only carrier offering direct flights between Dar es Salaam and Entebbe.

Air Uganda was launched in November 2007 and served a number of East African destinations including Nairobi, Juba, Dar es Salaam, Mombasa, Kigali, Bujumbura, Kilimanjaro and Mogadishu. Shortly before the initial grounding, there were reports of the airline's plans to extend its network to central, southern and north Africa. ■



Agents love Facebook

What social media tools do you have access to and use at the office for work-related purposes?



Club Travel adds Sabre to the mix

CHANA BOUCHER

SABRE has secured a deal with another retail group, this time Club Travel.

Through the strategic multi-year partnership with Sabre, Club Travel agents have access to the latest technology offered by the global technology provider. This includes the Red App Centre, which allows agents to customise their desktops; mobile tools such as the TripCase mobile app and Sabre iPad app; as well as the self-booking tool GetThere. The technology is said to give access to a whole new level

of travel experience, generate new revenues and drive efficiencies.

Club Travel will maintain its relationships with other GDS companies. **Wally Gaynor**, Club Travel md, says: "We are a multi-GDS environment with members using Galileo, Amadeus, Sabre and Worldspan. We offer ticketing and support for all these systems from our head office support centre."

He adds that Club Travel is now offering support to members who feel that the Sabre suite of products suits their individual needs. "In our environment we have

partners using one or more of the different GDS systems. We encourage our members to look at the systems and technologies offered by the different GDS companies and choose what's best suited to their individual needs. We are unique in the travel industry in not dictating to our members what GDS system they use," says Wally.

Wally believes Sabre is an innovative travel technology company and a key player in the market that will provide Club Travel with an end-to-end travel solution. "We wanted to commit on a strong partnership with them." ■

Comair thinks Big

From page 1

to maximise its email marketing strategy and gain a better understanding of its consumers. Since using these analytics, KLM has seen significant uplift in conversions through email marketing. **Frans Poldervaart** says: "The travel market by nature is very fast

moving and we needed to be able to quickly identify any potential customers interested in booking flights within the optimal timeframe of one hour."

What is Big Data?

Big Data analytics is the process of examining large amounts of data of a variety

of types to uncover hidden patterns, unknown correlations and other useful information. In the travel industry, Big Data allows travel companies to use the information that customers are already generating to provide them with better, more targeted and customised – and ultimately more profitable – services and products. ■

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