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TRAVEL NEWS WEEKLY

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Weak rand eats cheap seats

DEBBIE BADHAM

TRAVEL agents are battling to find availability of cheaper classes in economy class in the SA market due to the weak rand.

In a recent survey on TNW's sister publication, eTNW, 67% of the 111 agents surveyed said it was increasingly difficult to find cheaper classes available for purchase in SA.

"The SA market has a minimal number of cheaper seats," said one agent, and for this reason, agents are finding ways of bypassing point of sale and booking seats available in other markets.

Rand sold tickets have weaker value than tickets sold in other markets with stronger currencies, says **David Pegg**, md of Sure Viva Travels.

"Airlines are trying to balance tickets sold here with tickets sold in other markets in order to make a profit."

André Schulz, Lufthansa gm Southern Africa says: "In a highly competitive environment airlines have to carefully manage stock allocations to ensure a fair distribution to all markets, while at the same time ensuring that the route remains favourable to run."

Because of the weaker rand, Virgin Atlantic has seen a large increase in travel from the UK to SA this year and an


overall decline in passengers to the UK from South Africa, says country manager SA, **Liezl Gericke**. She says this has impacted general availability from South Africa to the UK and onwards to the USA.

Of agents surveyed, 60% said the availability of cheaper classes was more problematic for connecting flights via Dubai, London (to the US) and Paris (to the US).

Michelle Minnaar, manager, Harvey World Travel Plettenberg Bay, says, for example, flights are wide open if you look separately at availability from Cape Town to Dubai and then Dubai onwards. "However, we are unable to book legs separately and if you look for a through flight from Cape Town via Dubai connecting onwards, then only the more expensive economy-class seats are available."

The reason for this, says David, is that airlines believe they can make more money selling these legs separately than on a through ticket from Johannesburg. "It's all to do with yield management."

The bigger problem though, he says, is when the cheaper classes available in other markets start in SA, as travellers can then book cheaper tickets than agents can, who are restricted by point of sale. ■



The world awaits!

Air France and KLM are offering special fares to cities around the world for travel until June 2017. The special is valid for sale until September 23, 2016, with a blackout period from December 15-January 5. Pictured here, enjoying Amsterdam, are (from left) **Thobile Duma**, supervisor of Sales and Service Centre Agents and **Dino Khoza**, Sales and Service Centre agent of KLM. On the right, pictured in Paris, are **Amanda Dlamini** and **Freddy Mathole**, Air France Sales and Service Centre agents. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

Airlines rein in risk

TARYN NIGHTINGALE

DESPITE the introduction of lata's new financial criteria, Asata has been approached by agencies that have been asked – by airlines – to put up guarantees, in addition to their existing lata guarantees, to be able to ticket with these specific airlines.

The new financial criteria came into effect in March this

year and saw travel agencies paying highly increased minimum financial security amounts to ticket through the BSP.

Ceo of Asata, **Otto de Vries**, says the changes adopted in financial criteria were based on the recommended guidelines provided by lata in resolution 800F and were passed by the Passenger Agency Conference. He says

this meant all airlines accepted the financial criteria for SA's BSP region. "Airlines that are asking for additional guarantees are challenging the validity and strength of their association's (lata's) financial criteria policy," he says.

MD of XL Nexus Travel, **Sailesh Parbhu**, says it is not unusual for some airlines

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Nigerian carrier eyes SA

- TNW pick: Tricksters target travel agents
- SAA's HKG deadline extended
- Letter to the editor: Unfair working conditions
- Be careful what you post in Dubai
- R500 to the agent with the best special

TARYN NIGHTINGALE

NIGERIAN airline, Air Peace, is planning to launch flights to South Africa.

"We are currently in advanced stages of expanding our flight operations to regional and international destinations, including South Africa, Niamey, Niger, Abidjan, Ivory Coast, Cameroon,

China, Dubai, India and Atlanta," says Air Peace spokesperson, **Christian Iwarah**.

The SA Department of Transport has confirmed that Nigerian authorities have designated the airline to fly to South Africa. "However, the airline has yet to apply for a foreign operators permit to fly here," says **Andries Ntjane**, deputy director of licensing

and permits at DoT.

The airline launched in 2013 and its fleet comprises nine Boeing 737s and one Dornier 328. It currently operates domestically to destinations including Abuja, Lagos, Owerri and Enugu. On September 9 it announced daily flights from Lagos and Abuja to Benin. The airline is also planning to launch flights to Accra, Ghana, later this year. ■

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Air Namibia launches DBN flights

AIR Namibia has announced a new four times a week service between Durban and Windhoek via Gaborone.

The airline has been granted fifth freedom traffic rights between Gaborone and Durban and flights will commence

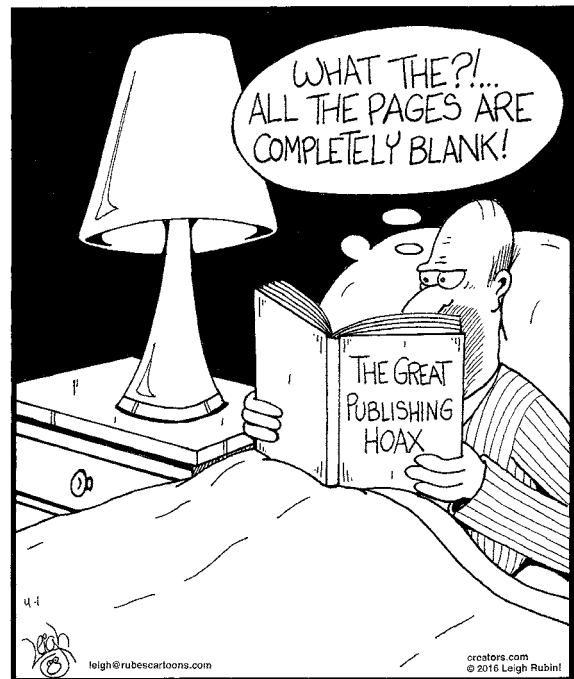
on October 30.

The service will operate on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays. Flight SW742 will depart Durban at 11h35 and arrive in Gaborone at 12h55. The flight will depart Gaborone at 13h40 and arrive in Windhoek at 15h00. The

return flight SW741 will depart Windhoek at 07h30 and arrive in Gaborone at 08h50. It will then depart Gaborone at 09h35 and arrive in Durban at 10h50.

An Embraer ERJ137 with 37 economy-class seats will be used on the route. ■

Rubes® By Leigh Rubin



EU – paid registration for visa-exempt travellers?

NON-EU citizens who are exempt from the requirement for a Schengen visa, such as American, Australian and British passport holders (post Brexit), may soon need to register and pay to visit the EU.

This comes as the Schengen area is looking at introducing a compulsory system of registration, based on the well-known US

Electronic System for Travel Authorisation (ESTA), which will require visa-exempt international travellers to register online and pay a set fee.

A spokesperson for the EU, told TNW that the European Commission was looking at introducing the Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS) in the near future, although a clear timeline

has not been identified yet.

The ETIAS will allow the EU to obtain information from travellers who previously didn't have to provide information when travelling to the EU, the spokesperson says.

The American ESTA currently costs US\$14 (R195) per passenger, and it is expected the EU will set a similar tariff of €13 (R203). ■

Gina Richter selects the top specials from Travelinfo

- **Africastay.** Zanzibar specials from R8 835pp sharing. Rate includes return flights from Johannesburg to Zanzibar, approximate taxes, return airport-hotel transfers, seven nights' accommodation at Paradise Beach with breakfast, lunch and dinner daily. Valid for travel until October 31.
- **Faircity Hotels and Apartments.** Falstaff Hotel, Johannesburg, weekend package from R1 242 per room per night. Rate includes one night's accommodation in a standard room with breakfast and dinner. Single room from R962 per night. Valid until December 11.
- **Falcon Africa Safaris.** Namibia. Rates from R7 650pp sharing. Offer includes return flights from Johannesburg, approximate taxes, three nights' accommodation in Swakopmund with breakfast daily. Valid for travel until October 31.
- **ICAN Holidays.** Russia – Two cities from R12 960pp sharing. Offer includes return airport transfers, five nights' accommodation, two half-day city tours and a day train from Moscow to St Petersburg. Set departures until October 7.
- **United Europe.** Dubai Parks and Resorts packages from R5 990pp sharing. Offer includes return transfers, three nights' Dubai accommodation with breakfast daily, two days' access to any two parks (one park a day). Choose between Bollywood Parks Dubai, Motiongate Dubai, and Legoland Dubai. Children aged 3-11 sharing with two adults, from R2 290pp. Valid December 1-29.



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Big brand hotels set their sights on Africa

TESSA REED

INTERNATIONAL and regional hotel brands are moving into Africa, changing the landscape and becoming formidable competitors to long-standing hotels.

Earlier this year, a report from W Hospitality Group found the number of planned hotel rooms in Africa was up 30% on last year.

Both **Wayne Troughton**, ceo, Hospitality & Real Estate Consulting at HTI Consulting, and **Lee-Anne Bac**, director of Grant Thornton Johannesburg,

say the interest from international brands is driven by the growth in Africa. Lee-Anne says hotel development tends to track economic development. According to Wayne, some countries in Africa have seen annual GDP growth of 6% and 7%, with some seeing even 9% growth.

Wayne says there are 41 international brands that currently have an interest in entering Africa. He says 10 years ago, when looking at operator selection for new developments, the firm was lucky to get interest from three or four brands. He adds that many

other brands, including those from the Far East and Middle East, are also coming into Africa.

“There are 41 international brands that currently have an interest in entering Africa.”

Hotel brands can quickly move into new destinations by signing management contracts, says Wayne. “If someone has the capital to build a hotel [the hotel brand] is not taking that commercial risk.”

According to Lee-Anne,

new brands entering Africa are serious competitors to existing properties.

She explains that many of the hotels in Africa have ageing infrastructure and international brands are coming in with new hotels.

Lee-Anne and Wayne point out that global brands are also internationally known and therefore come with a customer base that wants the security of knowing it can rely on a certain standard from a particular brand.

International brands can also leverage their loyalty programmes, says Wayne,

with loyalty programmes accounting for between 5% and 52% of their revenue. He adds that the spend of guests on these programmes is far greater than that of other guests.

Wayne says within the five-star segment, the entry of international brands on the continent will be a game changer. However, he also says international brands will find it challenging to enter the three- and four-star segment as existing local brands – typically dominated by domestic travel – are strong in these segments. ■

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Fastjet reviews operations

HILKA BIRNS

FASTJET's operations are under review following the recent appointment of **Nico Bezuidenhout** as the new ceo of the Tanzanian-based low-cost carrier.

“The fastjet group board and Nico have already commenced a review of fastjet's fleet, both the size and type of aircraft operated, the routes flown, the relocation of our head office to Africa and revenue generation initiatives. As such, there are no new route announcements planned until this review is complete, which is expected to be before the start of Q4, 2016,” the airline said in a statement. It was responding to *TNW* querying its previously announced plans for flights between Cape Town and Victoria Falls. Fastjet Zimbabwe

regional marketing executive, **Faith Chaitezvi**, told *TNW* the carrier planned to introduce a direct Cape Town-Victoria Falls service by the end of the year, which would enable passengers to connect at Victoria Falls to Dar es Salaam and from there to Kilimanjaro. Such a service would require fifth freedom rights, but the airline was not prepared to comment on this pending its internal review. The Department of Transport's deputy director: licensing & permits, **Andries Ntjane**, was not available for comment.

Meanwhile, Faith said fastjet's service from Johannesburg to Zanzibar had taken off “like wildfire”. “Load factors are in the high 80s and 90s and we have bookings all the way to February next year,” she said. ■

Book Beachcomber online

BEACHCOMBER has introduced a new tool on its website that allows travel agents to make live online bookings.

The tool, which launched on September 5, gives travel agents access to live air and accommodation availability, allowing them to get immediate confirmations on bookings. The online

service is available 24/7.

Previously, agents could only request quotes and perform payments through Beachcomber's website.

According to **Joanne Visagie**, sales and marketing manager of Beachcomber Tours SA, the new feature is user-friendly and will not require any training. ■



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Singapore Airlines recently deployed its A350 on the Johannesburg route. Debbie Badham was invited by the airline to experience the product first hand.

Inside Singapore Airlines' new A350

SINGAPORE Airlines has significantly increased its business-class capacity on the Johannesburg route through the introduction of its next-generation product, which features 42 business-class seats.

Market development manager, **Sally George**, says the increase in capacity is in response to market demand, adding that while it is still early days, booking numbers have been good since the new product's introduction.

The highlight of flying business class with Singapore Airlines is the airline's refined sense of hospitality. Flight attendants are put through strict training procedures to ensure passengers are treated with empathy and attentiveness.

During a visit to the airline's Commercial Training Centre in Singapore, **TNW** was given a sneak peek at the training procedures. New attendants are put through a 15-week training programme, during which the first five and a half weeks focus entirely on service. "It goes beyond cabin training. The hostesses need to learn how to sell that unique Asian charm," says **Juat Fang Foo**, assistant manager for cabin crew training. To qualify for business-class service, attendants undergo further training after a year's experience in economy class.

In terms of the product

itself, the A350's new business-class seat is spacious, measuring 71cm wide. It is surrounded by a fixed back shell which helps to create a general sense of space and privacy.

Business travellers needing to work will find the use of space convenient, with several compartments. Travellers can connect online via various electronic devices, and in-seat laptop power supply, USB and HDMI ports are all available. Passengers also have a range of lighting options, including an in-seat floodlight, enabling passengers to work or read with ease.

For passengers looking to get a good night's rest, seats recline to a comfortable, almost-flat position at an angle of 132 degrees, and a length of 198cm makes it possible to stretch out their legs.

More comfort, less cost
Travellers will appreciate the premium economy product's seat pitch of 97cm, which creates comfortable leg-room. A calf rest and foot bar also make a significant difference to passengers' comfort.

A number of other touches designed to create space and introduce comfort are a coat hook and the additional stowage spaces for a water bottle and mobile phone.

In-seat power supply and two



Juat Fang Foo (far right) addresses flight attendant trainees at the Singapore Airlines Commercial Training Centre.

USB ports are also provided.

The same noise-cancelling headphones that are available in business class are offered in premium economy. The in-flight entertainment system,

KrisWorld, also offers a customised user interface along with a wide selection of content.

Premium economy features a standard menu with three different meal choices.

However, through the airline's Book the Cook service, you can pre-order a wider range of cuisine for your travellers, including meals such as seafood thermidor and roast chicken.



The new A350 business-class product. Photo: Singapore Airlines

7 things to do in Singapore

1. Try authentic cuisine

For an authentic taste of Singapore, travellers can visit the Mandarin Orchard Singapore. The hotel's Chatterbox restaurant is famous for being the first five-star outlet to offer Chicken Rice, a unique and tasty dish made famous by the city's local hawkers. The view from the Meritus Club Lounge on the 38th and 39th floors offers panoramic shots of the city and is not to be missed.

2. Take Merlion selfies

Singapore's Merlion, the design of which is based on Singaporean legend, has become possibly the city's most iconic landmark. With the added bonus of the equally well-known Marina Bay Sands in the background, posing for a pic with city's famed lion is a must.

3. Learn some culture

A visit to the Rumah Kim Choo boutique gallery gives guests a glimpse into the world of Paranakan culture. From highly intricate beadwork to beautifully painted porcelain and unusual sweet treats, there is a great deal to be admired about this uniquely Singaporean culture.

4. Hop on a cable car

Another great way to take in stunning views of the city is to

visit Faber Peak and take a ride on the Singapore Cable Car. Travellers can also enjoy lunch at the buffet restaurant where they can appreciate the city's beauty as they dine.

5. Wander in the gardens

Paradise for nature lovers, the Gardens by the Bay is an architectural feat and realisation of the National Parks Board's vision of transforming Singapore into a city within a garden. The attraction has won many awards for its impressive indoor displays, including the world's tallest indoor waterfall.

6. Get a bird's-eye view

Much like the London Eye, the Singapore Flyer, offers breathtaking sights of the city. The largest observation wheel in Asia, the Flyer stands 165m off the ground.

7. Visit Resorts World

Children and adults alike will be impressed by Singapore's magical Resorts World. The S.E.A Aquarium, which Singapore tourist guide, **Suhail Jindran** says is the biggest in the world, is home to 50 000 different marine species, which glide along in their respective tanks.

Universal Studios has a variety of different rides to appeal to different



The S.E.A Aquarium transports visitors to a magical world of marine life. Photos: Debbie Badham

audiences. Thrill-seekers will enjoy being transported into the world of *Transformers* on a not-to-be missed 4D ride that involves a high-speed car chase. Visitors can also immerse themselves in the worlds

of *Jurassic Park*, *Shrek*, *The Mummy* and many more.

Travellers should leave adequate time to explore the park, as it draws crowds of visitors, which means queues can be long.

Did you know?

The city's size and efficient public transport system makes it easy for travellers to take in all the famous sights. Passengers stopping over in the city with Singapore Airlines can take advantage of the Singapore Explorer Pass, which provides one-time access to more than 20 different attractions. A one-day adult pass is available for purchase from Singapore Airlines until September 30, for SGD60 (R645). ■

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a blue top, is holding a large red rose. She has a surprised or excited expression. The background is a soft-focus indoor setting.

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Retail travel brands



What should the successful retail travel agency of the future look like? Debbie Badham consults movers and shakers across the industry.

Stand out to survive!

THERE has been a lot of talk in the retail travel environment about the need for agencies to rethink their business strategies if they want to thrive in current operating conditions.

Thought leaders say yesterday's ingredients for success are no longer enough. "You cannot base your business on the assumption that good service is the differentiator any more," says gm of Flight Specials, **Franz Von Wielligh**. "Good service is one of the basics for survival these days."

"As a travel agent, one has to think 'out of the box' and be completely entrepreneurial to succeed in the current economic environment. We can no longer afford to sit and wait for business to come our way but rather have to think of a multitude of different ways to encourage travellers to use our agency," says **Marco Cristofoli**, coo of BidTravel Leisure and md of Harvey World Travel South Africa.

Franz says the real question is: what is the glue that will make customers stick to a particular retailer?

It is about excellence in

executing your business model, says **Mladen Lukic**, gm of Travel Counsellors South Africa. "Whatever your unique selling point is, you have to be the best at it. If it's price, then you need to beat everyone else, if it's convenience then booking with you needs to be easier than ever before. If, as in our case, it's customer service, then it has to be exceptional, memorable."

"It is important to highlight key differentiating factors to remain competitive," agrees **Mary Shilleto**, ceo of Thompsons Travel. She says this includes elements like attentiveness, personalisation and innovation. "Buying power is also a key factor to be able to offer competitive pricing. What's more, when a client knows the brand is a reputable one that is financially sound with consistent deliverables, this contributes to continued success."

Total honesty and transparency coupled with hard work and service delivery are required in this very cut-throat environment, believes ceo and founder of the eTravel Group, **Garth Wolff**.

Mladen says people are

looking for companies that can provide tailor-made, personalised solutions. "You cannot survive if all you can do is provide the same old product everyone else sells, even if you do it more cheaply."

Product innovation

For Flight Specials, Franz says the key ingredients are superior product and destination knowledge, an emotional intelligence in understanding what clients want and ensuring that all angles are covered in terms of customer reach (online and store based).

Dinesh Naidoo, group operations director of Serendipity Worldwide Group, agrees that innovative product development is key, and says focus on customer service, keeping up with market trends, ensuring that you hire the right staff and that you are not overpriced are all important to success. He says it's simple, adding that SWG focuses on winning and not on the obstacles and challenges.

When it comes to providing the right products for the current environment, Marco



Garth Wolff

says one has to take into consideration the weak rand and be mindful of the value of all-inclusive packages. "Professionalism and a quick response are also paramount as there are so many offerings available through mobile devices. If you snooze, you lose."

Innovation in this regard, says Club Travel ceo, **Wally Gaynor**, is a combination of using technology to find the best product and price for the client; and offering ideas, products and solutions that

clients may not have thought of themselves. He points out that being available during and after the trip, offering service and peace of mind are all elements the Internet cannot compete with.

Agencies need to constantly watch expenses yet continue marketing so that when times get better they are ahead of the pack, says Marco.

Client centricity

Further to this, **Marco Ciocchetti**, ceo of the XL Travel Group, says agents need to move away from a model that focuses almost exclusively on reducing channel costs and toward one that seeks to maximise returns by best serving customer needs. "We need to understand that the customer experience does not begin at time of sale but at the time of search and extends well after purchase and travel."

He says customers must be the strategic focus. "We must use data to understand them, serve them better through partnerships and provide them with the best end-to-end experience to promote both sales and ongoing loyalty."



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Another example was a pending booking I was sure I would get - A doctor travelling from Wellington, NZ to a conference in Durban could only get a fare of R138 000 in Business Class. The global fare star system delivered the identical routing to me for R61 000. Once again, I had the freedom to add on a generous booking fee, whilst still impressing the client with a highly competitive quote.

Just another reason why, every day, I say a quiet 'thank you' that we are part of the Club Travel family."

BRADLY MUIR - Managing Director of Burns Cunningham Corporate Travel (A Club Travel Affiliate)



Data consistency is key in corporate

AGENTIVITY, which analyses data from the GDS, says it is clear that successful TMCs pay a lot of attention to the quality of their GDS bookings and maintain consistent ways of adding data to bookings.

"They simply don't tolerate consultants adding items like phone, email or other critical data elements to bookings in any way they choose, but rather they ensure that the required format is mandated as a company policy and adhered to," says Agentivity gm Southern Africa, **Yolande Bouwer**. She says savvy agencies then monitor this data, resulting in their being able to react to client demands for data in a professional, data consistent way. "This empowers even the smallest agent to compete very effectively with much larger TMCs."

Know your customers

Understanding customers is key. Yolande says this can be done, for example, by having access to previous booking data when customers book again. "This not only makes the transaction sound more personal but also helps the agency to understand which suppliers the customer wants to support."

Significantly, Yolande says this makes a potential upsell to ancillary content more of a possibility. She says agents can work more closely with suppliers by looking at forward bookings and pre-arranging agent discounts on some ancillaries. "These various ways of working with customers empower the agent to truly own the customer – repeat business is pretty much guaranteed."

In terms of specific cost-saving opportunities, Yolande says when it comes to large corporates, Agentivity sees many individuals from the same company arriving at an



"Savvy agencies then monitor the data, resulting in their being able to react to client demands for data. This empowers even the smallest agent to compete very effectively with much larger TMCs."
Yolande Bouwer

airport within a short time of one another. "Savings in transfer costs is a definite opportunity."

She says sometimes these data reports also help identify opportunities for agents to advise clients to rather cancel a trip as they were not aware another employee was travelling to the same city for the same meeting.

Overall, traveller education is another good cost-saving opportunity, says Yolande. "For instance, with Agentivity, a TMC has access to the booking patterns of individuals within a corporate, allowing the agent to easily identify those who constantly book only a day or so before travel, or those who change their bookings frequently, even before ticketing. Reviewing these reports with the travel buyer or owner of a corporate then helps them reduce their travel costs."

Are ITCs the way of the future?

GENERALLY the ITC and ITA models in South Africa are thriving, as more agents opt to follow this route.

"We are of the opinion that the ITC model is the way of the future," says Thompsons' **Mary Shilleto**. She says ITCs are usually entrepreneurial individuals who take responsibility, and who work all hours to write their own pay cheques.

Club Travel's **Wally Gaynor** agrees and says because an ITC's ability to earn is in their own hands, the group's ITCs are generally thriving.

As well as having the flexibility to earn more, SWG's **Dinesh Naidoo** says it is evident that more and more senior consultants are opting for the ITC/ITA model because of the relationship it allows them to develop with their corporate clients. He says SWG has offered an ITC/ITA model for the past five years and now has over 400



"For many travel professionals a healthy work-life balance in conjunction with the ability to grow a business that will ensure a good future for themselves and their families is the ultimate goal."
Mladen Lukic

ITCs or ITAs that work through the brand. Travel Counsellors'

Mladen Lukic says for many travel professionals a healthy work-life balance in conjunction with the ability to grow a business that will ensure a good future for themselves and their families is the ultimate goal.

"Working from home gives them the opportunity to achieve this goal and is the reason so many are considering the ITC option," he says.

So far, the ITC model has proved very successful and in terms of further innovation, travel professionals believe there is no need to fix what isn't broken. eTravel's **Garth Wolff** says the success of the ITC model is based on the relationship between the ITC and the traveller. "And, just like any relationship – for example marriage – if it is open and honest with constant communication, there is no reason why anything should change."

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A photograph of a jewelry store display. In the foreground, several necklaces with blue and clear gemstones are draped over a mirror. To the right, a pair of sparkling high-heeled shoes is visible. The background shows more jewelry hanging on a rack. A light blue banner with a torn edge effect is overlaid on the top half of the image, containing text.

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Capitalise on digitally savvy consumers

WHILE it's no secret that travellers conduct their own research online, industry professionals believe agents can capitalise on the situation.

"Many clients do their research online before they speak to an agent and often they choose product that is unsuitable," says Club Travel's **Wally Gaynor**. He says this is where agents can offer better options. "While clients often do not know the right place to look for answers, agents have the experience and access to more products and systems, for example, the GDS, which the client doesn't know about or have access to."

"Fortunately, on the flip side of any disruption there is opportunity," agrees XL

Travel's **Marco Ciocchetti**. He says this challenge is more of a disruption for leisure agencies than TMCs, and maintains that leisure agencies need to specialise to survive. "The leisure traveller is much more cost-conscious than the business traveller but also wants value for money. A specialist agent would know how to match traveller to product."

In line with this, **Hayley Walls**, marketing manager of Thompsons Travel, says agencies have to ensure that they are in line with or ahead of the pack in terms of innovation. "At Thompsons we have an efficient e-commerce team who are constantly researching new ways of how we can provide both an



Many clients do their research online before they speak to an agent.

online solution, while still offering that personal touch. The consumer needs to see that they are getting added value when booking through an agent. It is important to position the agency as one that provides this." She says, by highlighting destinations that are cost effective but

still require the expertise of an agent, agencies can demonstrate value.

eTravel's **Garth Wolff** agrees, saying agents need to fully understand the technology available to consumers and then use this technology to greater advantage by adding that personal touch.

Mladen Lukic of Travel Counsellors agrees that online should not be a significant threat for agencies.

He says if there are any instances where clients can get better product or a price online, the difference should at most be the service fee.

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Tech to consider

Important technology for agents includes social media advertising products, says BidTravel's **Marco Cristofoli**. "Clients are more likely to search for packages and good deals on the Internet, which means a strong agency presence on the net has to be standard. Mail Chimp (email marketing), sms and a strong Facebook presence are also musts, he says.

Retailers should have a presence online to reach potential clients who want to purchase their products and services online, agrees Flight Specials' **Franz Von Wielligh**.

"We have our own online system in-house to give our staff the edge, and use our own DMCs to remain competitive," comments SWG's **Dinesh Naidoo**.

He says for any agency to remain competitive it is essential that travel experts with proper destination knowledge are employed. "Even though the consumer researches before booking, they are then still comfortable booking through an agency or travel expert."

"I always chuckle when retailers talk about 'The Online gevaar' as if online is this big scary monster that has an appetite for retailers," says Franz. "Online agencies are simply agencies that acquire most of their business via online strategies. In fact, they are just as much normal retailers as bricks and mortar agencies."



"The leisure traveller is much more cost-conscious than the business traveller but also wants value for money. A specialist agent would know how to match traveller to product."

Marco Ciocchetti

"If a travel agent provides a service that adds value to a client's outcome or experience, then they are worth that little extra. If they do not, then they will not be in business too much longer."

"Customers go online because they want to be inspired. They are looking for suggestions they can trust. If they see you as a trusted adviser then they will rather work with you. That doesn't happen if you merely respond to quote requests. These they can get online. You need to do more," Mladen concludes.

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Days spent pen pushing? Getting back to the job you love

To do list:

- Pay Office Rental, Staff Salaries
- IATA Bonding
- Review ADMs & Staff Errors
- Bad Debt write offs
- Year End Audit, Company Tax
- Staff Reviews, plan leave dates

- Refunds
- Submit Marketing Plan for 2017
- Consider Franchise Opportunities...



Remember the excitement when you first started working in the travel industry? Chatting with customers to plan their perfect holiday. Pouring over itineraries, flight schedules and hotels to make sure every detail fit the bill. Designing those trips that have created a lifetime of heart-warming memories...

The travel industry has gone through an incredible number of changes over the years, and the digital age that we live in has brought with it a wealth of opportunities and challenges. Something that hasn't changed though, is the thrill of helping a family to head off on their perfect trip, and the joy in finding out that the holiday was everything they'd hoped for, and more. It's an irreplaceable feeling and no matter the cutting-edge technology we

use in the travel industry, there's little to match personal service that helps to fulfil people's dreams.

Climbing the career ladder as a travel agent, however, often means missing those special moments. With staffing levels to plan, yearly auditing to arrange, marketing budgets to sign off, and everything else that comes with managing or running a travel business, it's difficult to fit in the part of the role that drew you to the travel industry in the first place.

Finding a balance: Business owner vs travel agent

Fitting in chatting with customers about the exciting destinations they could be jetting off to, with budget planning for the coming month is a tricky business, and one that's hard to juggle. How do you strike a balance between running your own travel

business and being involved in the very aspect of the job that appealed so much all of those years ago?

While there isn't a 'one size fits all' approach when you're trying to find a balance between managing a business and being involved with customers' travel plans, one of the ways to get back to doing the job you love is to look at becoming an ITC. You run your own travel business but there's a support team behind you to help with everything from marketing to IT, so you can concentrate on creating bespoke holidays for your customers.

Getting back to the job you love – booking holidays!

At Travel Counsellors, we know that our ITCs are travel experts. Each Travel Counsellor is passionate about the travel industry and has a

wealth of experience, and it's our job to support them from behind the scenes. We don't expect our Travel Counsellors to be IT experts, marketing gurus or admin wizards – we've got a dedicated Head Office team of over 250 people to help, and they provide support in every area of the business. This allows our Travel Counsellors to provide the bespoke holidays and exceptional customer service that we're known for.

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With us...it's personal

Staff salaries? Office rental costs? Marketing budgets? A handy checklist to help you get back to what you love doing most - booking travel!

Daily distractions, such as making sure staffing levels are adequate, ensuring the office overheads are paid on time, and grappling with technology, mean that it can be difficult to know where to start when you're looking to make a career change.

To help you identify some of the tasks and costs you're working with each day, we've created this handy checklist. Use the 'notes' column to work out how much of your day is spent in the back office, and the difference being a Travel Counsellor could make to your day.

Responsibilities for Owner Managers	Travel Counsellors Way	Notes (Consider time & cost)
Operational Costs Staff Salaries, Office rentals, IATA bonding, Equipment & Maintenance, ADM write offs, Bad Debts, Staff Errors	N/A	
Website Website development, hosting service, mobile optimisation, website updates	Provided Free	
Technology Purchase PC's, printers/fax/scanner, MS Office Suite, Antivirus, email hosting, Back-ups, insure and maintain	Provided Free	
Marketing Plan & allocate budget for: branded advertising, electronic marketing, social media, PR, sales promos	Provided Free	
Legal / Associations ASATA, BBBEE, IATA	Provided Free	
Commercial Track sales figures to chase overrides. Put an end to non-preferred sales	No Directional Selling Better Comm% Neg upfront Phenix - default comm at 25%+	
Accounting / Financials Company Bank Account, merchant agreement, CC charges, bank charges, accountancy charges	Provided Free	
Trading / Production IATA licensing, after hours call centre charges, BSP refunds processing, ADM protection	Provided Free	
Corporate Travel BBBEE, tax clearance, MIS reports, CC Statements, Lodge cards	Provided Free	
Training Continuous personal training, updates, new product, new technology, destination training	Dedicated Business Development Coach to guide you	
Admin HR Staff leave (sick, family responsibility, holiday, educational, maternity, study leave), Client quoting, invoicing, refunds, filing, customer complaints, tracking sales, staff performance reviews, CCMA hearings, Warnings,	N/A	

Brands that walk the talk

There are many ways for travel brands to differentiate themselves in a tough operating environment and retail brands have found innovative ways of achieving successful growth. *TNW* looks at what some of these brands are doing, and how.

Brand credibility

Harvey World Travel has focused on creating brand awareness and promoting the Bidvest link to HWT to improve the credibility of the brand. **Marco Cristofoli** says the agency is promoting the fact that HWT offices have professional staff who take genuine care of their customers and don't simply book tickets without going the extra mile.

For example, checking in the client online, sending them welcome home letters, birthday greetings and so on. "We are also offering more than just the booking. We include added features, information and assistance at no extra charge to ensure that our customers feel they are getting value for money."

Marco points out that the group is not in the business of competing on price alone as some other players within the industry are doing.

"This is not sustainable and leisure customers and corporates alike are seeing past all the smoke and mirrors. Good old-fashioned, genuine relationships are



"We are offering more than just the booking. We include added features, information and assistance at no extra charge to ensure that our customers feel they are getting value for money."

Marco Cristofoli

key." He says this sifts out the order takers who work on commission only and have to make a sale to keep their jobs at all costs.

Greater personalisation

Travel Counsellors has made personalisation its mission. **Mladen Lukic** says the group makes sure its clients understand that Travel Counsellors' job is to craft personalised holidays and best travel experience.

"In the corporate environment we guarantee outcomes and always exceed our clients' expectations.

"When we do this, our clients become our ambassadors and our business grows. To be able to achieve this consistently we continuously invest in our technology, we carefully select the partners we work with and source our own product where we can achieve better value for our clients. We never stand still and are always a step ahead of our competitors."



SWG has launched 'Serendipity Art of Health'.

Diversification

SWG has a two-pronged focus. **Dinesh Naidoo** says not only has the group created "wow" products but it has also diversified into other areas besides travel in order to succeed in

the tough economy. "With our new brand, Serendipity Art of Health, we offer our clients an immune boost before they travel and a detox session after they travel using Rife Technology."

Encourage entrepreneurialism

Club Travel drives business growth by placing the power to succeed in the hands of its members.

Wally Gaynor says the group's leisure business is now mainly handled by independent business

owners or ITCs who have a vested interest in good old-fashioned exceptional service. "If they don't sell and grow happy repeat clients and consequently referrals, they don't have an income," says Wally.

Driving loyalty

Flight Specials is about to launch a consumer loyalty card that will allow customers to recover a percentage of their spend as points in a savings basket. "These points can then be used not only toward discounts on their future travel, but also as a discount with various other non-travel retailers," says **Franz Von Wielligh**.



Franz Von Wielligh

Staff satisfaction

eTravel's focus is on ensuring that members are well taken care of. **Garth Wolff** says

the group keeps its promise to its ITCs by being 100% dedicated to them.

Size plus service

Thompsons is a well established brand and part of JSE-listed company, Cullinan Holdings. However, **Mary Shilleto** says, while the group is big enough for

that to make a difference, its customers know that Thompsons still really cares about their business and delivers the edge through personal service.

Investing in technology

XL Travel has increased its investment in technology with a focus on improving the customer experience.

Marco Ciocchetti says this is done through mobile apps, data sciences (data analysis) and duty of care.

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How to drive loyalty

IT IS generally more expensive to attract a new client than to keep an existing one. This means that agencies that want to succeed are placing significant emphasis on customer retention.

Forward-thinking travel brands are looking at loyalty strategies they can incorporate into the travel environment.

Indeed, SWG's **Dinesh Naidoo** says strategies to encourage customer loyalty are very important in any business.

"At Serendipity Worldwide Group we have a rewards programme just for our loyal customers that includes a 24-hour concierge service assisting with just about anything, including plumbing, tutoring for our members' children from Monday to Friday, two-for-one dining and movie tickets, to name a few."

Thompsons Travel's **Hayley Walls** says a one-stop-shop travel solution goes a long way to encourage customer loyalty.

"If a corporate client is getting fantastic service when it comes to their business travel and knows they will be getting the same when it comes to leisure and meetings, they won't need to look elsewhere," she says.

Service is key agrees XL Travel's **Marco Ciocchetti**, who says travel retailers need to become customer centric by showing gratitude and, in so doing, improve the guest experience.

"We need to discover and foster a shared purpose with our customers. Improving the end-to-end guest experience is a critical step in attracting new customers and keeping the ones we already have."

Marco says, to do this, agents need to understand the customer

by enabling two-way conversation.

Travel brands are improving the customer experience and driving loyalty in a number of different ways, comments BidTravel's **Marco Cristofoli**.



"At Serendipity Worldwide Group we have a rewards programme just for our loyal customers that includes a 24-hour concierge service assisting with just about anything." **Dinesh Naidoo**

"For example, offering clients prizes for making bookings, entertaining corporate secretaries more often; offering corporate client booking engines that provide the corporate the freedom to make its own bookings and yet still ticket through the agency," he says.

Brands are also becoming more savvy in the way they reach customers, says Marco Cristofoli.

"They are offering a weekly travel service on site at certain residential estates and housing or complex developments and they are holding more functions, inviting clients and friends to attend specific presentations," he says.

Use technology to transform the retail experience

AGENCIES have shown significant growth in terms of the retail experience they are able to offer clients.

Regarding technology specifically, **Dinesh Naidoo** says the travel industry is very savvy. "At SWG we have an app that is available on all smart phones."

Hayley Walls agrees, pointing out that over the past five years the advent of the self-booking tool has seen agents transition from purely traditional agencies to brands offering a technology solution that provides the client with the independence to search for their own travel requirements while at the same time reducing the overall cost of travel.

"This technology can be tailored to the individual client's requirement with regard to travel policy, approval processes and the like.

"The technology is constantly evolving and travel brands really need to stay current and ensure that they are offering their clients the best solutions available in the market." Hayley says combining this technology with the very best in customer service ensures that the travel brand stays

top of mind with their clients.

In line with this, travel brands are implementing online tools for both corporate clients and leisure clients to help with the search and booking process," says **Marco Cristofoli**.

He adds that the GDSs offer various technology innovations that HWT will be implementing across the group in the foreseeable future.

"Our global fares system gives access to competitive airfares in over 85 countries, often cheaper than those available in South Africa."

Club Travel says, on the retail side, most of its technology aims to enable its consultants to access fares, product and negotiated rates easily in a global environment and, in so doing, provide them with the competitive edge.

"Our agents have access to systems that our competitors do not. For example, our global fares system gives access to competitive airfares in over 85 countries,

often cheaper than those available in South Africa. What's more, our intranet system provides product and aggregator sites at the consultants' fingertips," says **Wally Gaynor**.

However, going one step further, Wally says Club Travel is investing in a client-facing system where all e-tickets and vouchers can be booked via any GDS system, direct through the supplier or via websites. This will be available online via smart phone or laptop.

Looking to the future of corporate technology, **Marco Ciocchetti** says agencies need to introduce user-friendly corporate solutions by offering travellers access to familiar, consumer-like experiences. They also need to find a way to balance costs with traveller and employee satisfaction, he says.

"I see a move towards digital personal assistants (mobile technology) to improve customer relationship and customer experience. The travel assistant keeps travellers informed at each step of the journey, including aspects like departure, arrival, delays and gate change."

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Navigating retail relationships

AGENTS need to ensure they develop strong relationships with their suppliers to remain competitive.

However, the relationship that exists between agents, suppliers and clients is continuously under strain as a result of the drive online.

"There is a very fine line here," says Thompsons Travel's **Mary Shilleto**.

"We are dealing with extremely well-informed travellers today, who do much of their own research online.

"Agents look to operators for expertise, however newcomers to the industry are not necessarily always equipped to offer insight

into destinations that would match the knowledge of an informed traveller or a very well experienced retail agent," she says.

"We only work with partners who can do something better than we can or bring something we cannot source ourselves," agrees Travel Counsellors' **Mladen Lukic**.

He says, just as retail agents need to demonstrate value to their clients to stay in business, so operators and agents need to demonstrate value to each other to continue working together.

"When partners add value to each other there is no reason for encroachment."



Joanne Visagie, sales and marketing manager of Beachcomber Tours, agrees adding that "cheapest" is not a strong ingredient when

it comes to ensuring long-term clients.

"We believe it is imperative to sell quality products backed by excellent service to provide value for money and ensure we retain clients as repeat customers."

As part of its strategy, Beachcomber offers ongoing specials to the trade, as the operator believes that those agents who visit its properties will fall in love with the product and develop a trust for it over the long-term.

"We are firm believers in this, and want as many travel agents as possible to experience the Beachcomber product," Joanne says.

Club Travel says, apart from the Indian Ocean Islands where local tour

operators still offer value, the group has given its consultants access to global suppliers directly.



"Cutting out the middleman enables the agency to not only offer the client a better price but also gives the consultant the opportunity to make a higher commission." **Wally Gaynor**

Wally Gaynor says cutting out the middleman enables the agency to not only offer the client a better price but also gives the consultant the opportunity to make a higher commission.

Honesty is key to success, says **Garth Wolff** of eTravel. "If there is a service to be offered openly and honestly, all players within the tripartite can make a decent margin. It's when dishonesty and greed creep in that the relationship sours," says Garth. ■



"'Cheapest' is not a strong ingredient when it comes to ensuring long-term clients." **Joanne Visagie**

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Otto heads up WTAAA

ASATA ceo, **Otto de Vries** has been appointed new chairman of the World Travel Agents Association Alliance (WTAAA). The WTAAA meets twice a year to discuss issues that impact the global travel agency industry and to share common problem-solving strategies. Key areas of focus for Asata



Otto de Vries

and the WTAAA continue to be understanding the impact of Iata's New Distribution Capability for travel agents. Asata also aims to identify the root causes behind the issuing of ADMs in the hopes of reducing these through training and improved controls through the Iata ADM working group.

SAA announces new board

THE latest additions to SAA's board have been announced. **Duduzile Myeni** has been elected chairperson again. **Mmakeaya Magoro Tryphosa Ramano** has been appointed deputy chairperson and non-executive director. Mmakeaya is a chartered accountant who has also been SAA's cfo. She is also the cfo and board member of PPC Ltd. A further 10 new appointments have been made and they will all

serve in non-executive director roles. These are **Bajabulle Swazi Tshabalala, Thandeka Nozipho Mgoduso, Nazmeera Moola, Akhter Hoosen Moosa, Gugu Sepamla, Siphile Buthelezi, Peter Holmes Maluleka, Mzimkulu Malunga, Martha Mbatha and Peter Tshisevhe**. The new members will serve a three-year term, which started on September 1, while Duduzile will serve for a period of two years.



Site's sights set on success

Site (Society for Incentive Travel Excellence) held its annual summit at The Pivot at Montecasino in Fourways on August 23. A full programme of speakers with focused, relevant topics ensured a productive morning for delegates. **Henk Graaff**, owner and md of SW Africa Destination Management, and a board member of Site, is pictured here with Site president, **Tes Proos**, owner of Crystal Events and Incentives.

Playing with penguins



Mango, PE-based newspaper, *The Herald*, Tempest Car Hire and towel manufacturer, Colibri Towels, donated several kilograms of towelling to the Southern African Foundation for the Conservation of Coastal Birds (SANCCOB). Pictured here viewing rescued and cleaned African penguins at the SANCCOB rehabilitation centre in Cape St Francis are Mango guest service representative **Nomatamsanqa Nesi** and Mango Port Elizabeth Airport manager, **Martyn Nel**.

Appointments

■ **Sandton** Convention Centre has appointed new gm, **Shaun Bird**. A graduate in hotel management, Shaun previously worked at the Holiday Inn London-Kings Cross Bloomsbury and Le Méridien Piccadilly in London. He managed the food and beverage operation at the Country Club Johannesburg in Woodmead and the Carousel Casino in Pretoria, and has also assisted at the Pecanwood Golf and Country Club and Morula Casino.



■ **Bruce Deneys** has been appointed chief sales and marketing officer of ILIOS Travel where he will be responsible for sales and marketing as well as client relations and PR. Previously, he held a sales management position at Triumph Travel and was director of sales and marketing at the Pepperclub Hotel & Spa.

■ **Thomas van Bochovehas** been appointed hotel manager: rooms at Fancourt. Thomas began his career in food and beverage and has held senior positions with the Sheraton Group, The Cape Royale Hotel and Sun International. **Desmond Morgan** has been appointed new executive chef at Fancourt. Desmond completed his apprenticeship under chef **Garth Stroebel** at the Belmont Mount Nelson Hotel, and has also worked at Orient Express Hotels, the Mantis Collection and the Legacy Group. His most recent position was executive chef at Conrad Pezula, Knysna.

■ **Oupa Pilane** has been elected president of the Kruger Lowveld Chamber of Business and Tourism, taking over from Dr **Noah Fakude**. Oupa holds a Master's degree in Public Development from Wits University, and is the owner and founder of Nelspruit's Ubuntu Kraal Guest House.

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Min 5 years' wholesale experience. Outbound travel. Africa knowledge. Tour Plan. Consult both telephonically and on email, via agents and to direct clients. Email: nonocv@pcs-sa.co.za

Client Relationship Manager – Cape Town

Quantex Recruitment Group
Business management degree & 4+ years' similar working experience. Sound financial knowledge, sales/relationship building skills, as well as presentation skills essential. Email: bridget@quantex.co.za

On-line Travel Guru – Durban

Lee Botti & Associates
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Wholesale Travel Consultant – Bryanston

Equity Connections cc
Leading operator looking for creative thinker with sound FIT skills. Design tailor-made itineraries into South/Southern/East Africa. Minimum three years' experience. Email: equitycon@mweb.co.za

Senior Outbound Incentives Consultant - West Rand

Wendy's Travel Personnel
Minimum 3 years' experience in incentives, experience in ticketing, reissues and fare builds. Essential to have travelled with groups! Email: wtp@icon.co.za

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TNW7650

China flights to CPT? Not yet...

DARISE FOSTER

INDUSTRY rumours that Air China is planning direct flights from Beijing to Cape Town have been quashed by the Department of Transport, which has confirmed the airline has not formally applied to fly to the Mother City.

However, **Keith Gow**, md of Gateway Travel and Tours assured *TNW* that Air China was planning to fly to Cape Town but the plans had not yet been finalised.

"The rumours began when Air China said it was planning to fly to Cape Town because the type of equipment used on the Johannesburg-Beijing route – a 14-hour flight – was not conducive to the altitude of OR Tambo International Airport, which is 1 680m metres above sea level," Keith says. Johannesburg's

hot and high conditions make it difficult for Air China's aircraft to uplift a full load of fuel, and this could restrict the numbers of passengers and freight during the daytime departures, he says.

To overcome this, Air China would need to depart in the early morning around sunrise, or later in the evenings when temperatures have cooled down – which does not suit aircraft scheduling, says Keith.

"The conditions for these aircraft are better at sea level, which allow aircraft to uplift a full fuel and passenger load, thus it may be through a twist of events that Cape Town gets the direct flight to Beijing," Keith says.

Air China did not respond to requests for comment by the time of publishing. ■

Win a trip to India

Travel agents can win one of five spots on a G Adventures Golden Triangle Trip to India in 2017. To qualify, agents must book a minimum of 10 passengers on any G Adventures tour to any destination by December 31, 2016. As an added incentive, Etihad will pay for two of the five winners' flights on the trip, provided they book Etihad flights along with the booked G Adventures tour. Pictured here from Development Promotions are (from left): **Christine Lucas** (marketing); **Sarah O'Mahony** (sales executive); and **Jen Skinner** (reservations). Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

SAA digs into West Africa

DARISE FOSTER

SAA is set to take the next step in developing its presence in West Africa with the introduction of flights from Johannesburg to London and New York via Accra.

The Department of Transport in South Africa confirmed that SAA had expressed interest in launching the flights and Ghanaian reports say the airline plans to launch a Johannesburg-Accra-New York service by the end of the year.

Kendy Phohleli, md of XYZ Aviation Consulting

and former executive of Africa Hub Strategy at SAA, told *TNW* the Ghanaian government had granted fifth freedom traffic rights – where it can stop, offload and pick up passengers before landing in the final destination – for SAA to fly from Accra to the UK, Canada and the USA.

Last year the airline successfully launched its Johannesburg-Accra-Washington service (see *TNW* September 30, 2015).

SAA currently flies direct to both New York and London, but Kendy says the benefit of stopping en route on long-haul flights significantly

reduces operational costs and improves profitability.

June Crawford, ceo of Barsa, says growth on the African continent is part of SAA's Long-Term Turnaround Strategy, so additional services from Accra would be in line with this.

"Not only would it strengthen SAA's presence in West Africa, but it also provides options for both Ghanaian and South African travellers," she says.

The airline's spokesperson, **Tlali Tlali**, declined to confirm or deny that SAA would be launching services to London and New York via Accra. ■

Impulse poll
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It's time to get professional

Should the travel industry be professionalised?

- Yes, it would level the playing field for those operating honestly
- Yes, it would help to build trust with a client
- No, it would lead to agencies being closed down

63%

28%

9%

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Airlines rein in risk

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to ask start-up agencies for guarantees over and above the guarantees the airlines may already have in place with Iata.

"In instances where agencies have defaulted and eventually rectified it with Iata, some agencies have faced issues with airlines where they have requested guarantees to mitigate their risk," says Sailesh.

Furthermore, some airlines might not ask for additional guarantees but won't allow some agencies access to their CIPs if they deem them "risky businesses", he says.

Start-up agencies aren't the only targets, says **Marco Cristofoli**, md of Harvey World Travel.

"Cathay, in particular, has enquired with a few Harveys," he says, adding that it seems airlines analyse each travel agent separately to

determine their risk.

Dinesh Naidoo, group operations director of Serendipity Worldwide Group, says airlines have been asking for extra financial security for several years, especially when the agency is dealing with high volumes.

He adds that Emirates requested a considerable additional guarantee from SWG.

But SWG has now renegotiated the additional guarantee with Emirates, because the group decided to move over to the Default Insurance Programme, which the airline feels offers greater protection against risk than a guarantee does.

COO corporate travel at BidTravel, **Lidia Folli**, says airlines are within their rights to request guarantees over and above the Iata requested guarantee in terms of their own credit

assessment process.

Sally George, market development manager of Singapore Airlines, says the carrier does not request additional guarantees from South African TMCs unless the circumstances are exceptional.

"We will only grant ticketing access for agents who have been trading with an Iata licence for more than a year and have the potential to sell tickets to the destinations we operate to," says Sally.

Agents who have not been granted ticketing access do, however, have options available, says Sally, and could either ticket through the airline's website on behalf of the passenger, via another agency or through the airline's ticket office.

Iata, Emirates and Cathay Pacific were not available for comment at the time of going to print. ■