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Storm at sea

CI asserts market position

TESSA REED

C RUISES International has issued a notification to the travel trade on July 2, warning them not to book Royal Caribbean cruises through “unaffiliated” channels. But agents have raised their concerns that this limits their options.

“It has come to our attention recently that a local operator has been trying to persuade the local market that they can book cruises on Royal Caribbean International and its affiliate

brands by bypassing Cruises International and using a third party located overseas,” the statement reads. “This activity is prohibited and Royal Caribbean International is in the process of taking steps against the relevant parties to put an end to this practice.”

“We are concerned that if anything happens to bookings through this [third party] channel, travel agents and their clients will be at risk,” **George Argyropoulos**, Cruises International

md, told *TNW*.

TNW asked Royal Caribbean if and what steps were being taken against “the parties”, but all the company would say was: “Cruises International is RCI Cruises’ only contracted partner in South Africa selling Royal Caribbean International, Celebrity Cruises and Azamara Club Cruises. Travel partners wishing to sell our products in South Africa should work directly with Cruises International.”

To page 2

Hola Johannesburgo!



Iberia has put its new A330-200, ‘Johannesburgo’, on its thrice-weekly service between Madrid and Johannesburg. Read more about Iberia’s newest aircraft on page 2. Pictured in the business-class cabin are **Celia Muñoz**(left), Iberia’s head of sales in EMEA and Asia; and **Carol Petersen**, gm preferred partners, Tourvest Travel Services. Photo: Tessa Reed

Changes at Tourvest Travel Services

TESSA REED

CLAUDE Vankeirsbilck has been appointed chief operating officer of American Express Global Business Travel (GBT) at Tourvest Travel Services, while **Wayne Muirhead** has taken on the role of chief sales officer at TTS.

Morné du Preez, ceo of Tourvest Travel Services, said the appointments were part of a realignment of the company, to position

it for growth over the next five years.

In his new role, Claude will be responsible for everything to do with GBT, while Wayne will be responsible for sales across all the TTS brands, with a focus on travel IT.

“It’s an exciting opportunity for me,



Claude Vankeirsbilck

having been in sales and marketing for Tourvest Travel Services for the last 10 years,” Claude told *TNW*. He said being in a more operational and client-centric role, he would be responsible for

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399 attend first Online Expo

ALMOST three times as many people as expected checked out the first Online Expo in the travel industry.

The Now Media Show, a one-day expo aimed at travel marketers, featured exhibitors and a line-up of authoritative speakers on marketing issues.

“The main purpose was to demonstrate how such technology looks and works as it emulates a traditional show and

can be used to reach a geographically spread target audience like travel agents,” said organiser, **Natalie Cumberlege**.

Future shows will specifically target travel consultants.


Natalie, who comes from a background of running traditional consumer and specialist shows, said afterwards that the attendance of 399 had

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Online expos extend the reach for exhibitors.

Online Expo

From page 1

smashed expectations. “It had proved the ability for exhibitors to reach people who in the past could not afford the time or cost of leaving their workstation,” she said.

Reshma Diva in Tshwane summed it up. “Love the idea. The way of future travel expos. Great for travel consultants working from home who can now interact with suppliers and get updated on travel products

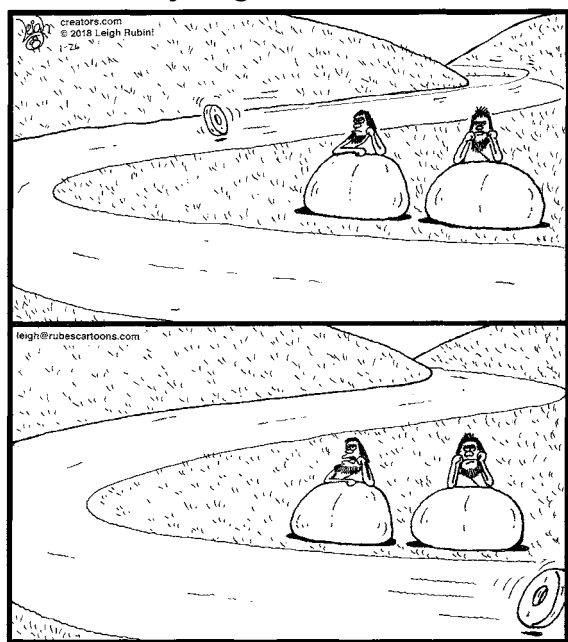
via a virtual show! Well done!

Online Expos is a division of Now Media, which publishes *TNW* and *Travelinfo*. You can see the archived demo expo at www.thenowmediashow.co.za

The next show, *Into Africa*, on September 13, is aimed at corporate travel buyers, TMCs and leisure agents.

Contact Natalie at nataliec@nowmedia.co.za if you have show ideas or want to see the demo. ■

Rubes® By Leigh Rubin



“Newfangled driverless technology.”

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NEWS

Government cuts back on travel spend

ZIA TAYLOR

GOVERNMENT has reduced travel budgets as part of its cost-containment measures, which, in some instances, have caused a reduction in bed nights and flights for certain suppliers.

Sailesh Parbhu, md of XL Nexus Travel, says stringent measures have been put in place. He adds that compliance to government's department-wide travel policy is measured on a monthly or quarterly basis by means of supplying TMC reports to National Treasury, which then concludes vetting and verification on airfares and other expenses.

Another TMC, who chose to remain anonymous,

suggested that cost cutting could also be politically motivated, based on the upcoming elections. “We saw the same kind of cost containment happening around the last elections.

“Cost cutting could be politically motivated. Government doesn't want to be seen wasting money on ‘unnecessary’ or extravagant travel.”

Government doesn't want to be seen wasting money on ‘unnecessary’ or extravagant travel,” said the TMC.

A few hotels based near parliament said they sometimes got government

rejections, purely based on rates. “We've noticed this trend recently, with most of the rate rejections coming from SAPS,” they said.

Explaining the criteria government uses to determine whether or not travel is necessary, Parbhu said: “Every government department has a national plan and the plan is basically driven by their executive committee, from the director-general's side. Then, they've got portfolios within each government department with weekly, monthly and yearly plans. The responsibility for fulfilling those obligations within government drives meetings, and dictates whether they need to travel or not, all within the limits of budgets.” ■

Iberia puts new metal on Joburg route

IBERIA's newest A330-200 landed at OR Tambo on June 28. The aircraft has been named ‘Johannesburgo’ and will service Iberia's Johannesburg-Madrid route.

It is configured with 19 seats in business class and 269 in economy.

Business class offers seats that extend into two-metre-long beds, all with direct access to the aisle,

and a 39cm touch screen. In economy class, the seats are 46cm wide and have individual 23cm screens, as well as an adjustable headrest. WiFi is offered in both classes.

Iberia resumed its operations from Johannesburg in August 2016 with three non-stop flights a week to Madrid. The airline has experienced

an 8% growth on its Johannesburg route from May 2017 to May 2018.

The aircraft is the 12th A330-200 received by the Spanish airline, which also operates the aircraft to cities in Latin America (Havana, Medellin, Rio de Janeiro and Santo Domingo), the United States (Los Angeles and San Francisco), as well as Asia (Shanghai and Tokyo). ■

Storm at sea

From page 1

Agents reached out to *TNW*, expressing their concern that this took away the consultant's choice of dealing with another operator with whom they have a relationship and may receive a better service.

“We would prefer not to deal with a company owned by a competitor,” adds one agency head, who would prefer to remain anonymous. Cruises International was acquired by BidTravel last year.

Cruises International's agreement with Development Promotions has come to an end, however the company still has agreements in place with other operators, including Thompsons Holidays and Travel Vision.

“Royal Caribbean sales went through the roof, mostly due to Development

Promotions' good marketing to agents,” says the agency head.

One agent told *TNW* that the service offered by Cruises International was not on the same level as Development Promotions. “I can phone DP at 21h00 and they will pick up the phone and help me,” he said.

“That's the service I need. I don't just want someone to fire off a quote when I am asking for information. I want them to help me sell the product.”

Another issue is that cruise lines try to force agents to deal with a GSA. “In this online world, you can go on to overseas cruise sites and see the same cruise heavily discounted. If you, as an agent, try to book it, you are threatened by the cruise operator that your clients may be penalised

because you did not book through the official GSA,” says one agent.

However, **Lee Habib-Allah**, senior consultant at Cruise Corner Sandown, describes the service at Cruises International as wonderful, and adds that Cruises' ‘better price’ policy to beat rates clients find online really sets them apart.

Jackie Adami, md of Development Promotions, told *TNW* the company had employed a trade-first strategy since 1972. “Our focus over four decades has not changed. We remain committed to delivering the best service and product to our South African travel industry partners to ensure their success and deliver peace of mind that their business is in the hands of a company that has a proven track record.” ■

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New Avalon itineraries

AVALON Waterways has introduced six new itineraries as part of its 2019 River Cruises brochure. The cruises are: Active Discover on the Rhône, an eight-day cruise from Arles to Lyon, and reverse; Reflections on the Seine, a nine-day cruise starting and ending in Paris; Enchanted Europe, an 18-day cruise from Budapest to Basel, or a 16-day cruise from Basel to Budapest; and Colourful India and the Ganges River, a 13-day cruise from Delhi to Kolkata. The cruises will all operate on Avalon Waterways ships, offering floor-to-ceiling, open-air balconies. With the cruises, Avalon Waterways will extend its Avalon Choice services, providing a selection of included excursions and on-board activities. They include 'discovery' activities like cooking classes and painting workshops; 'active' excursions such as guided jogging tours, cycling, paddling, and hiking; as well as 'classic' experiences, where local experts are on hand to share knowledge and insights through the history and heritage of local destinations. ■

Travelbags pulls into Sandton



The travel trade were hosted at Radisson Blu Gautrain Hotel for Travelbags' carnival-themed June luncheon. All proceeds were donated to Kitty and Puppy Haven to support the rescue and rehabilitation of stray animals. Pictured (from left): Michelle Muller, director of sales and marketing Radisson Blu; Michelle Hinrichsen, Travelbags president; Clynt Groenewald, sales manager Radisson Blu Gautrain Hotel; and Werner Geere, general manager Radisson Blu Gautrain Hotel. Photo: Savannah Freemantle

SA's bricks and mortar agencies stay put

SAVANNAH FREEMANTLE

SOUTH Africa's retail agencies continue to stay relevant, while almost 700 UK high street agencies closed last year as a result of stiff OTA competition. Industry experts told TNW that the closures, reported by UK-based research firm, Local

Data Company, reflect a trend in UK consumer behaviour that won't be felt by the South African travel market. "The UK market has become very online-savvy compared with our local market," says Andrew Stark, md of Flight Centre Travel Group South Africa. "We have 85 productive high street

locations in the UK compared with the 110 retail outlets in South Africa. South Africans still buy their travel from people and we don't foresee our Flight Centre operations slowing down. "Our focus is on retaining our key locations and developing a balance between our online presence and brick-

and-mortar operations." Otto de Vries, ceo of Asata, says the local market can't be compared with the UK as it is on a smaller scale. "While we also saw a reduction in high street travel agencies a few years ago, the market has since stabilised and is predicted to remain stable. "We attribute this to the

South African market's ability to adapt to new technology and its focus on corporate travel over leisure. The rate at which the market grows, or remains stagnant over the next few years, will depend on how much expendable income the local economy allows for and how much of this is used for travel." ■

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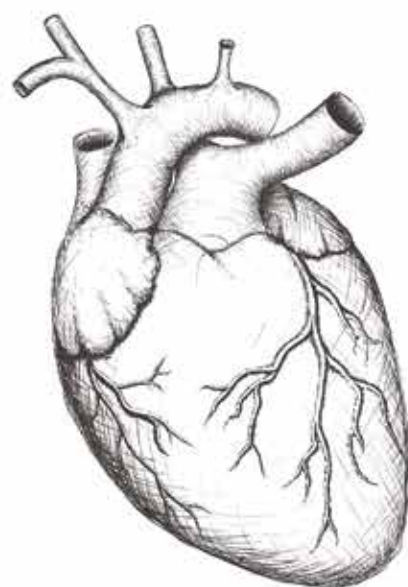
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51%

of consultants at travel agencies say that management is the one thing they'd change at work.

+

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*According to a 15-year study by the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health

The annual Thailand Travel Market Plus (TTM+) was held this year at the Ocean Marina Yacht Club in Pattaya from June 13 to 15. Candice May reports.

A fresh take on Pattaya

THE Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) wants the travel trade to see Pattaya, widely referred to as the ‘sex capital of the world’, through new eyes.

Pataraporn Sithivanich, executive director – Europe, Africa and Middle East regions of TAT, told *TNW* that, while Pattaya had an infamous history, it was no longer what it once was, and she therefore encourages South African tourists seeking an off-the-beaten-path experience to visit. “While the mainstream cities of Bangkok and Phuket remain popular among South Africans, there are some tourists who seek a less commercial holiday. Secondary cities such as Pattaya are ideal destinations for these travellers to visit.” She adds that Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai and Rayong are also gaining popularity as uncommercial holiday destinations among South African tourists.

Tanes Petsuwan, deputy governor of international marketing for

long-haul markets of TAT, says Pattaya has undergone a huge transformation. In addition to the upgrade of the airport, the construction of new highways and the new cruise facilities at Satahup Commercial Port, Pattaya has also recently welcomed elegant new hotels, resorts, shopping malls and restaurants.

Chatupornpaisar Buranakan, owner of Thailand-based destination management company, Jumbo Travel & Events, explains that Pattaya offers several unique tours that highlight the history and culture of the city.

One example is a tour through the coconut plantations, where tourists meet at the home of a couple who produce and locally distribute coconut products such as coconut oil, coconut milk and coconut water. After sipping on freshly brewed coconut coffee and learning about the history of the plantations, guests then set off on bicycles to explore

the lush green plantations first-hand. The tour finishes with a cooking class in the home of a local Thai woman in the coconut plantations. Chatupornpaisar also recommends a tour to the local fishing village. After a walk through the old streets of northern Pattaya, the tour visits the local fish market, then on to the harbour where guests are taught by a local fisherman how to make fishing nets. The fisherman then takes tourists on a small fishing boat to a nearby private island to enjoy a seafood party. It is held at the oldest bungalow in Pattaya and tourists are treated to a variety of freshly caught seafood cooked in front of them – think cowfish deep-fried in a crispy batter, fried rice with prawns, deep-fried crab cakes and fire-grilled prawns.

Travel agents, however, think Pattaya will be a tough sell.

Tracey Visscher of Flightsite, says while Pattaya has a lot to offer, South Africans are unfamiliar with the destination and it therefore may take a lot of convincing to sell.

However, **Venice Barris** of Travel Vision feels that Pattaya may be an appealing destination to experienced Thailand holidaymakers as it offers something completely different to the mainstream cities.

Vivienne Mellows of Thompsons Holidays adds that having an array of properties by trusted hotel groups in Pattaya may make the destination easier to sell and give agents who have not travelled there themselves peace of mind when selling it. Examples of such hotel groups are Centara, Mövenpick, Hilton and Hard Rock.



Chatupornpaisar Buranakan, owner of Jumbo Travel & Events, who is affectionately known as Jumbo to the community, picking fresh bananas from a tree during his tour through the coconut plantations.

TAT targets romance travel

STRENGTHENING romance travel is also a key focus for the Tourism Authority of Thailand.

Tanes Petsuwan, deputy governor of international marketing for long-haul markets of TAT, said at a media briefing that strengthening romance travel formed part of TAT's new marketing concept, ‘Open to the new shades’, which aims to showcase the diversity of a holiday in Thailand. “We have been very successful in launching this new campaign in all markets across the world. Our new image of a million shades is a recognition of the individuality of our tourists as well as our way of focusing on quality tourists rather than mass tourism,” he said.

Tanes said the theme around wedding and honeymoon travel was chosen as it reflected Thailand's aim to position itself as a quality romance travel destination. “Weddings and honeymoons are an important segment for us,” he said. “In 2016, TAT estimated that wedding and honeymoon travellers represented 1,1m visitors, generating \$1,77bn (R24,3bn). Honeymoon travel was the biggest segment, with almost 980 000 visitors. We are targeting growth of 5% this year.”

He said the incredible tolerance of the Thai people was another thing to note, as it made Thailand a perfect destination for any couple – irrespective of their age, race, religion or sexuality. ■



Pictured at the Hard Rock hotel in Pattaya are (from left): **Nodine White** from Perfect Destinations; **Wendy Goutier** from kulula holidays and **Giles Clinton** from Checkout Tours.



South African travel agents arriving on the first day of TTM+. Pictured (from left) are **Vivienne Mellows** of Thompsons Holidays; **Wendy Goutier** of kulula holidays; **Nodine White** of Perfect Destinations; **Venice Barris** of Travel Vision; **Giles Clinton** of Checkout Tours; and **Tracey Visscher** of Flightsite. Photos: Candice May


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New at Uniworld



Uniworld Boutique River Cruise Collection invited members of the trade to the launch of its 2019 brochure at the Fairways Hotel in Randburg on June 28. During the presentation it was announced that Uniworld will offer four new and two enhanced itineraries. It will also change the way cabin types are named, and in 2019 will re-launch the *River Royale* after it is upgraded to Super Ship status as the *SS Royale*. Pictured here are (from left): **Bianca Wild**, from Flight Centre, **Kelly Jackson**, head of sales for The Travel Corporation South Africa, and **Michelle Higino**, from Cruise About. Photo: Jason Simpson

To the point



El Al will reduce lata agent commissions in June next year, but has not yet confirmed by how much. Commission on tickets issued up to and including May 31, 2019 will remain at 4%.

CASE STUDY

Duma books 36 000 bed nights for World Choir Games

SARAH ROBERTSON

THE World Choir Games started in Tshwane on July 4, the first time this global biennial event, which features over 300 choirs, has been held in Africa.

Danie van Wyk, gm of Duma ICE and Sport, told *TNW* that Duma was appointed the official tourism partner responsible for accommodation services and immediately set about sourcing accommodation in the Tshwane region for the 16 000 international participants plus their friends and families.

Danie says it involved the painstaking tasks of contacting and vetting schools, universities, hotels and guest houses in Pretoria and surrounding areas to determine their suitability. This was a daunting task, as the initial event specs had estimated international attendance of between 15 000 and 30 000 attendees.

Accommodation categories were then broken down into three sections. The most popular basic accommodation options were sourced from school and university residences, mid-range

options were sourced from two- and three-star hotels, and four- and five-star properties were sourced for the luxury options. Danie says persuading the various accommodation establishments to offer similar pricing within the three accommodation brackets was a particular challenge. Choir registration then commenced, with Duma booking more than 36 000 bed nights over the next six months or so.

Danie says the event is the largest Duma has arranged to date. He says the permanent Duma specialist team who organised the event consisted of seven people who sourced and booked all the accommodation over the past 18 months. Duma has also had to bring in dozens of contract workers to assist with operational tasks. For instance, contractors have had to be stationed at each of the 40 accommodation establishments during the event.

Themba Nthombeni, ceo of Duma, says he hopes the hosting of this global event in Africa will spur more regional choir games, as over 9 000 people are participating in the event from South Africa alone. ■

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HARVEY WORLD TRAVEL

celebrates two decades in South Africa

A note from head office

BACK in 1997, an international business delegation landed in South Africa with the aim of opening up a Harvey World Travel franchise. At that stage, HWT had been in operation for over 40 years, having started as an Australian family-owned business in 1951.

Presentations were held around the country. The opportunity to join a leading international travel brand generated much excitement in the trade. BidTravel bought 50% of the franchisor and the very first store opened its doors to the public in Groenkloof on March 1, 1998. In 2015 BidTravel purchased the remaining 50% and now owns 100% of Harvey World Travel South Africa. As part of this group, which has significant market share in the SA travel sector, we ensure unparalleled negotiating power with all travel suppliers.

Twenty years later, HWT is one of South Africa's most well established retail travel brands, boasting the most geographically expansive network in Southern Africa with over 70 agencies located in South

Africa, Lesotho, Swaziland, Botswana and Zimbabwe. Each one of our franchises is staffed with an efficient team of expert travel consultants waiting to send the public to their dream destinations. We also pride ourselves on being some of our preferred suppliers' top supporters.

Our network services both leisure and corporate, with an approximate split of 70/30 in favour of corporate travel. Our broad product range ensures that we can personalise travel experiences, whether for a tailor-made holiday or a high-pressure business trip.

Our agents have access to a wide variety of training and skills development, which is a key focus area in order for them to remain a step ahead.



Anneke Geldenhuys
General Manager
Harvey World Travel South Africa

Our head office offers operational assistance with brand management, marketing, lead generation, and IT tools and support.

We attribute the longstanding relationships we have with our franchisees to the unchanging core values of our brand – that is transparency, honesty and good, old-fashioned ethical business practice, which HWT head office and agencies have embodied for the past two decades. We also do our utmost to keep with the times, changing our outlook, services and products as needed.

We have many plans and goals for the future, a number of which will be launched later this year, so watch this space...

The story behind the Harvey's

Karin van der Kaay Owner of Harvey World Travel Groenkloof

"I started out in travel with SAA in the late Sixties before moving into retail travel and progressing through the ranks at various agencies. I was managing a Pretoria-based agency when the Harvey

delegation arrived in South Africa. At the presentation I was inspired by the prospect of starting my own agency and so I signed up," says Karin. Harvey World Travel Groenkloof was the first franchise to open in South Africa and Karin quips that one of the benefits of being the pioneer was that they furnished her entire office.

Karin says that, from the outside, one consortium may seem very similar to

another. The benefit of being part of the HWT group is that all outlets are owner-managed. "This really adds something to the mix in the form of commitment to both the business and its public," she says.

"It has been so personally fulfilling to open and run my own business. People ask me when I am going to retire and I always say: 'death or lotto – whichever comes first'," Karin jokes.

Brigitte Gonggryp Owner of Harvey World Travel Highway



Chairwoman of the Harvey World Travel Franchise Advisory Council (FAC), Brigitte Gonggryp joined the group 17 years ago. "I was running about five other businesses when I heard that Harvey World Travel Kooof and Hillcrest was for sale.

I bought in with partners and over the years it became clear that this was the business to focus on and I remained in the travel game."

Brigitte has always been passionate about travel, having visiting over 60 countries in her lifetime. She feels that it is important, as an agent, to be able to speak with authenticity about the destinations you are selling. She adds that her staff were

the foundation of her business as she relied on them for consulting, as she had no prior experience in the industry. Most of her staff have been with her for the full duration of her time as an HWT agency.

Over the years the agency grew, winning the 'Harvey Office of the Year' twice, once in 2008 and again in 2012. "It was also a great honour to be selected by Club Med as the launch agency for its new Club Med 'shop within a shop' concept two years ago," she says.

Craig Cowgill Owner of Harvey World Travel Randburg

20 years ago Craig attended the Australian delegation's presentation in

South Africa and says he found it very impressive. He was running an agency which was registered with another consortium at the time but decided to switch across to Harvey, attracted by the international brand. Craig says he has never looked back.

"The group offers us great value

for money, and the support head office offers is a particular benefit. We love the balance of being able to make use of excellent preferred supplier negotiated rates, while also enjoying the freedom to maintain an independently owned and operated business," he says.



Alan and Jackie Viljoen Harvey World Travel Centurion

In 1998, Jackie Viljoen was working 12-hour days as a travel consultant. Hearing through the grapevine about the HWT delegation that were signing up franchisees in South Africa, Jackie and her husband, Alan, set up an interview, prepared a business plan and soon

afterwards found themselves opening their own franchise in Centurion. The business grew, and when the couple decided to open a second travel office, Alan joined the business full time, overseeing the marketing and accounting functions of the businesses.

Twenty years later, Jackie and Alan's office ranks as one of Harvey's top 10 agencies, and their 2015/16 Harvey Office of the year award is a matter of

much pride. "Looking after our staff has been the reason for our success. We wouldn't be in the position we are in today without them. Our entire team, except one relative newbie, has been with us for nine or more years," says Alan.

Over the last two decades the industry has changed so much, but throughout this time we have had the continuous back-up of head office. They are reliable and approachable, and the support structure works well as they still allow us the flexibility to be our own bosses and to run the business as we see fit," he says.

In the early nineties, Mahesh heard about a travel agency in Botswana that was up for sale. He investigated but when the deal didn't work out he ended up starting his own agency called 'The Travel Centre'. The Harvey delegation visited Botswana at about the time when independent agencies were starting to align with consortiums, as airlines and suppliers were cutting back on direct deals.

"It was definitely beneficial to be part

of an international brand, and also to have BidTravel's buying power behind us. Head office took on all the preferred partner negotiations on our behalf and we were able to generate extra revenue from introducing a leisure department right at the time when commissions were



Mahesh Clover Owner of Harvey World Travel Gaborone

cut. It was also great to be able to attend the HWT conferences, which were held in different cities around Australia and New Zealand. I learned so much from the international exposure," he says.

Zakira Osman Branch Manager of Harvey World Travel Springfield



In 1992 founder Yunoos Osman, bought Marathon Travel, an existing agency in Springfield that specialised in sports travel. He remembers it being a

great time to be a part of travel, with a lot of support from airlines and suppliers, and the opportunity to interact personally with clients.

Over the years, the agency diversified into leisure and corporate markets and became the

leading travel agency in the country for pilgrimage tours to the Middle East. In the late Nineties they were the first agency to charter a 267 EgyptAir aircraft from Durban to Jeddah for pilgrims. This market continued to grow, with their charter expanding to a 400-seat jumbo, picking up 200 pilgrims in Durban and 200 in Johannesburg the following year.



Jay and Misha Bhula Owner Managers of Harvey World Travel Fordsburg

Harvey World Travel Fordsburg, as it is known today, was founded by KL Modi more than 40 years ago and is one of the oldest travel agencies still in operation in South Africa today.

Mr Modi studied law with George Bizos but, due to apartheid restrictions, found it difficult to practise and turned to travel instead. He retired a year ago at the age

of 86. His daughter and son-in-law, Jay and Misha, have now taken over managing the agency.

"We have remained a small agency, keeping things manageable and building up our reputation through the years by trying to operate ethically at all times, says Jay.

"We joined Harvey 20 years ago to take advantage of their international reputation and to pool our resources with other agents in order to negotiate better rates with our suppliers. Over the years, head office has provided a backbone of support, great service and good deals, which have helped us to flourish," says Jay.



Call Harvey World Travel Head office on 087 330 2060 or email adminoffice@harveyworld.co.za
website: www.harveyworld.co.za



TRAVEL TECHNOLOGY

From blockchain to chatbots, it's a brave new world, with innovations that are shaking up the status quo. Sue van Winsen investigates.

Blockchain – should you care?

FROM instant payment processing to queue-less airports, the potential of blockchain technology to eliminate some of the biggest pain points in travel has been loudly touted across the globe. But is the hype to be believed and, if so, how soon can agents expect this technology to change the way they do business?

Explaining the way blockchain works, **Sara Pavan**, head of Amadeus Innovation Partnership Programme, says it is a technology that enables a new way of conducting digital transactions safely and transparently, without the need for a third-party intermediary.

Other important features of blockchain include the fact that information can only be added to the network but never removed. Also, information is controlled, authenticated and validated by participants in the network rather than one central administrator. "It uses cryptography to secure transactions, which is a very important element because it means information remains encrypted and kept private," says Sara.

Why travel?

"I believe the travel industry is a good field of opportunity because

it's an ecosystem with multiple players that are interacting with each other across different points of the journey. Each of those players, at a certain point, is exchanging and storing information and validating information with other players. This creates a complex system of back-end processes – this can be significantly improved with blockchain and we have identified this line of innovation as a priority for future activities," she says.

Sara uses a hotel booking as an example, where an aggregator, online travel agency and hotel all need to settle cash and commissions based on pre-defined agreements. "Today this is an extremely complex process and the introduction of 'smart contracts' – using blockchain technology to exchange items of value in a transparent way – could automate settlements in many areas of the industry," she adds.

Some of the potential applications of blockchain in the travel industry include the guarantee and distribution of contracts, payments, travellers' identity and ticketing, says **Claudette Thorne**, country manager: South Africa at Travelport. "Each application requires investment and collaboration across

partner organisations for it to be successful. In an industry that is already built on trust, where strong relationships exist and that is working to manage complexities – we have started by asking the important question: 'Is there a role for blockchain?'"

In the pipeline

She says, to answer this question, Travelport launched a technology innovation study into blockchain and distributed ledger in mid-2017, and defined two proofs of concept that have focused on managing on-boarding (uploading of traveller data) and the management of travel content for secure distribution and selling. "The next stage will be to develop a proof of concept further with selected travel and technology partners," says Claudette.

Travelport has also been considering other potential use cases for blockchain, covering different aspects of travel, from holding inventory and guaranteeing a reservation to making payments.

"The real impact of blockchain and distributed ledger technologies will be a reduction in processing times and efficiency improvements for any process where multiple parties must



"Each application requires investment and collaboration across partner organisations for it to be successful."
Claudette Thorne

share and agree the same information," says Claudette. Examples include invoicing, settlement, moving of payments, contract negotiation and identity verification.

"Travelport customers currently undertake many of these activities using manual processes with multiple checks and verification steps. A distributed ledger secured by blockchain would ensure that all parties agree on a single version of the

truth in real time, cutting out many of the existing processes," she adds.

Amadeus says it has identified blockchain as one of its six 'innovation themes' and is currently assessing its potential in various practical ways. Sara says Amadeus's blockchain efforts are focused on seamless traveller identification across borders, delivering interoperability of loyalty programmes, enhancements to its existing B2B wallet service to facilitate international payments, more secure and efficient bag tracking services, and a neutral proration (money distribution) solution for airlines.

"We have live blockchain prototypes today in areas such as baggage tracking," says Sara, who adds that Amadeus is working with IT companies such as Accenture, along with several new blockchain start-ups, to devise concepts and new pilot opportunities.

A long-term approach

Sara says despite being at a very early stage of development, blockchain is gaining significant traction with an estimated US\$1.2bn (R16.2bn) invested in application over the last two years.

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From page 10

While these developments may all sound exciting, agents shouldn't hold their breath for implementation, as many of these are still being tested and are a long way off from roll-out. "Most businesses outside the fintech industry are still at an exploratory stage and are watching what others are doing to see who will make the first move," says Sara, who believes it will be five years before agents see blockchain at a mainstream level.

There are also a number of barriers still hindering growth. Sara says these include regulatory obstacles, along with issues around the scalability of the technology and its ability to keep up as volume increases, as well as the cost involved of adopting new applications and synching them with existing systems.

"We are undergoing a lot of exploration and we are using our expertise of travel to apply blockchain where it really makes sense," says Claudette, adding that Travelport is taking a dual approach

of developing prototypes internally, while also collaborating with third-party tech start-ups. She says it will take some time before the first-use cases go live – also because it will be a process to change mindsets and drive adoption by proving the value for both companies and final users.

Claudette adds that, in the short term, most blockchain developments will happen in close supplier groups on private and permissioned chains within the travel industry. "In the mid to long term, we may see payments, inventory and order management disrupted by blockchain or distributed ledger technologies," she says.

"Whole trip management on blockchain, air settlement and combining of air supplier journeys we see as a longer-term opportunity, anticipating further evolution within blockchain technology." She says the willingness of travel suppliers to offer or sell content on blockchain will drive advancements in these areas.

TRAVEL TECHNOLOGY

Some applications of blockchain in travel

- Sara Pavan** of Amadeus says there is a wide range of potentially important applications of blockchain technology for the travel industry.
- Today, travellers are often members of various loyalty schemes with disparate points. Using blockchain, they could store all their loyalty points in a single digital wallet and redeem them easily, whilst also sending and sharing points with friends via an app. "Blockchain means points can be much more universal, as cash is today," she says.
 - The highly trustworthy, immutable nature of blockchain also makes it ideal for improving the way travellers are identified during their journey. Traveller IDs are required at booking, when changing a booking, at security, the boarding gate, duty-free shopping and the hotel. "Imagine how much easier travel would be if you didn't need to use a passport at all these points in the journey. It is possible blockchain could deliver a much more frictionless experience for proving a traveller's identity," says Sara.
 - Baggage tracking is another complex challenge involving multiple decentralised actors (airlines, ground handlers and airports). "Consider how much reassurance you'd have as a traveller with a single view of where your bag is, perhaps available via a mobile app. A shared blockchain-based system may improve the accuracy and efficiency of tracking and managing bags across the industry," adds Sara.

Blockchain timelines

Travelport has estimated how long it will be before agents can expect to wait until various travel applications based on blockchain technology will be launched.

Short term (1-2 years)	Mid term (2-5 years)	Long term (5 years+)
Limited B2B payments	Travel cryptocurrency exchanges	lata coin for air settlement
Basic traveller identity	Reservations on distributed private ledger	Whole trip on blockchain
Private permissioned distributed ledger for supplier inventory	Cryptocurrency payments for travel	Interlining across blockchains
Travel cryptocurrency/token offerings	Early lata coin adoption for air payments and settlement	Global traveller identity
	Traveller identity shared across suppliers	

Source: Travelport



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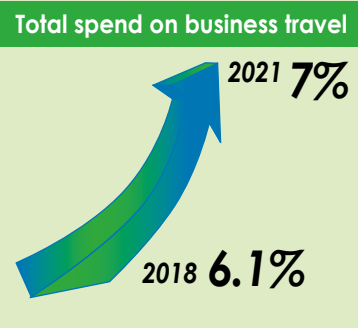


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How to transform your travel management business

TRAVELPORT has released an eBook offering insights on how TMCs can make their approach and consultancy expertise invaluable for customers.

Over the past two decades digital transformation has disrupted the operating models of many established businesses. The world is changing, and customers want to buy and engage in different ways. The Global Business Travel Association forecasts that total spend on business travel is set to grow by 6.1% to 7% over the next three years. The



challenge for TMCs is knowing how to implement digital transformation in a cost-effective way, while still recognising that their people and their knowledge are often what sets them apart from digital competitors.

Today, over 40% of business travellers are engaging with the same content on more than one device simultaneously. 82% engage with content via their smartphones, 63% on their laptops and 28% via their tablets. And the smartphone market still has significant potential for growth, particularly in Africa and the Middle East.

This opens a world of new opportunities for TMCs to transform customer services and enhance loyalty through new ways of

TNW7970

engaging with travellers. Corporate clients want to experience the same sleek, end-to-end experience that they do when booking their vacations. They also need to be able to access this interface from anywhere, as clients now work and book while they travel.

According to the Adobe Consumer Content Survey, millennials spend an average of 9.6 hours on their devices per day, while Generation X spend 7.9 hours and baby boomers 6.1 hours per day. TMCs need to embrace digital omni-channel technologies, reinventing themselves to exploit new sources of value.

Travelport's global business traveller research reveals that more than 55% of travellers use voice-activated search to find relevant information. New tools such as message and voice-based interfaces and automation can enhance flexibility, provide duty of care and reduce travel costs. TMCs must connect with travellers, not only at point of booking but before booking, throughout their journey and after they return.

Business travel today is about offering choice. Many clients are now looking for authentic local experiences. Sharing economy resources can fulfil this demand. While

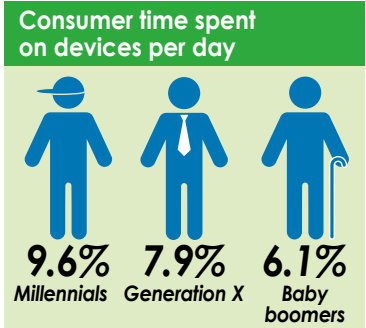
these products have not traditionally been available on the GDS, TMCs are now regularly booking them.

Content choices are also expanding because suppliers are disaggregating their offering. New initiatives, such as the incorporation of IATA's new distribution capability (NDC) into the booking process means that more optional extras may be available at the time of booking. Content is becoming richer and corporates are looking for tools that can meet the demand for more information and data.

Content aggregators offer a simple supplier comparison experience. This, however, is so simple that it cannot provide the data corporates require. Also, if corporates are not using approved booking channels, the risk of data leakage is high and it is difficult to manage travel policy compliance. The opportunity to add value and enhance loyalty is lost. TMCs can now offer NDC-compliant airlines' own rich data if they engage with an NDC-enabled technology partner. There is also a growing demand for apps that can help travellers who need to make itinerary changes. Travelport's global digital traveller research found that 52% of travellers want concierge

services on their smartphones. These are particularly valuable in supporting business travellers likely to be in potentially risky locations.

Yet, not every traveller wants little or no interaction with a real person. Digital technologies can help here too, supporting the consultant to offer great service to customers in the face-to-face or telephonic environments. TMCs must adapt how they engage with customers to meet their evolving needs. Platforms such as instant messaging can provide a fast and convenient communication



channel. TMCs can now also make use of the exponential increase of data available to devise specific personalised recommendations for each client in the form of consultancy services. Such actionable intelligence allows TMCs to add value and therefore develop customer loyalty.

Digital transformation is also powering more multinational and global travel programmes. While a multimillion-dollar account needs data to negotiate its own deals, smaller accounts might want to take advantage of a TMC negotiating on its behalf. In the future, TMCs are likely to be viewed as an integral part of the business travel supply chain rather than merely as intermediary distributors.



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Delicate balance between high tech and high touch

ONE of the main advantages agents have over the Internet is the ability to provide the human touch – a friendly voice on the other end of the phone, talking travellers through any problems or changes that may crop up during travel. But what if this isn't what travellers really want?

According to the 2017 Egencia Business Travel and Technology Survey, exactly half (50%) of global respondents (business travellers) would

avoid human interaction on the road unless they were having a problem, and more than half (56%) said they wanted access to business travel tools to do more on mobile in general.

Other findings in the Egencia survey include that 48% of respondents would like to use text to update their travel arrangements, while 43% believe advances in artificial intelligence (AI) would help improve their travel experiences.

A local perspective

But, warns, **Mladen Lukic**, gm of Travel Counsellors SA, agents should view these results with caution. "As with any survey, the outcome will be largely dependent on the choice of audience and the formulation of the questions. It's not surprising that a survey by an OTA finds that customers do not wish to talk to humans.

"We absolutely believe in the opposite. Our clients don't want their time wasted and they want prompt, independent, accurate and qualified, trusted information from our Travel Counsellors. If a client doesn't trust the source, then clearly they will reject talking to it."

Others felt that we're just starting to see the beginning of a similar trend locally, including **Aadil Esack**: gm of product and marketing for XL Travel. He says: "Many travel processes can be automated and made more efficient, so it's a case of knowing your client and looking at where you can truly add value based on experience and where you can use technology instead. As a TMC, you should give your client the option."

When considering local travellers, **Annemarie Lexow**, sales and marketing manager of Travel Vision, says she has noted that millennials and mobile-savvy travellers on holiday find it easy to find things to do through apps and Google searches – but only once they arrive at their destination. "Business travellers are different. They



prefer to stay in touch should anything go wrong with travel arrangements."

A balancing act

So, where does this leave the corporate travel agent? **Jannine Adams**, senior manager: marketing at Amadeus Southern Africa, says consultants need to realise that local travellers expect

still take great comfort that they can phone the TMC and sort things out when technology fails them," says Jannine.

Getting the balance right between high-tech and high-touch can be a delicate act, and Jannine emphasises that a "one-size-fits-all approach" is a thing of the past.

"Today, travellers demand customisation. They want products and services that respond to their needs and preferences. An important facet of today's travel experience is how well travellers feel their needs and preferences are being understood by travel providers. This includes striking the right balance between respecting their desire for independence and lack of intrusive service, which may shift at different points along the trip cycle. Enhancing their trip by checking in to offer additional elements or assistance might be appreciated," says Jannine.

Mladen also adds that the balance between contact and technology will be different for each client and the agents' business model. "In our world, it is not the transaction, but the overall outcome that defines our relationship. As long as we are prompt, accurate and trusted, clients will expect and accept all communication," he says.



Mladen Lukic

their journey to be a seamless travel experience with travel-savvy business travellers demanding a more 'connected' experience. "Travellers want a multi-channel approach with access to real-time information."

But this doesn't mean that the agent doesn't have a crucial role to play. "At the same time, business travellers

Demand for 24/7 digital support and human advice

A recent survey by Travelport has shown that millennial business travellers in South Africa demand both cutting-edge digital support throughout their trips and on-demand advice from human consultants.

The research surveyed 11 000 travellers in 19 countries who took at least one return flight in the last year, including 500 travellers from South Africa. Findings included:

- One-third (37%) of South African millennial business travellers now count being unable to access booking

information across their devices 24/7 as one of their biggest gripes.

- Two-fifths (39%) say not being able to get expert advice from human consultants during the booking process is a major annoyance.

Other findings of the survey included that most of South Africa's millennial business travellers are now doing their own research before finalising their travel plans. Among the most common tools used to build their itinerary are general advice sites (used by 89%) and

review sites (87%). Looking through videos and photos posted by travel brands on social media (81%) is also typical, as is using voice-search technology (54%).

While on business trips, South African millennial business travellers on average use 18 different categories of apps. Of these, map apps are among the most popular (used by 92%), along with those that provide video tools (91%). High results were also recorded for social media (90%), travel review (81%) and destination guide (77%) apps.

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The limitations of chatbots

WITH improvements constantly being made in artificial intelligence (AI) technology, chatbots are starting to play a more complex role in the travel industry, with various businesses investigating the opportunities they present.

While not launched locally just yet, FCM's chatbot, Sam, has been introduced internationally and has the ability to send through pre-trip information such as weather updates, organise airport transfers and provide up-to-date airport information. But despite being able to automatically sync travel plans and rearrange travel within a corporate's policy, the bot also offers live chat with travel consultants – illustrating that in some instances, only chatting with a real person will do.

Illustrating this point, research indicates that users are reporting frustrating experiences when interacting with chatbots.

Last year, Facebook



“Travel advice on travel planning will remain better served by consultants.”
Rian Bornman

announced that it would be integrating chatbots into its Messenger app to answer users' questions, but found that its bots failed to complete 70% of user requests without the

help of a human.

Despite this, various travel businesses are still keeping an eye the chatbot trend.

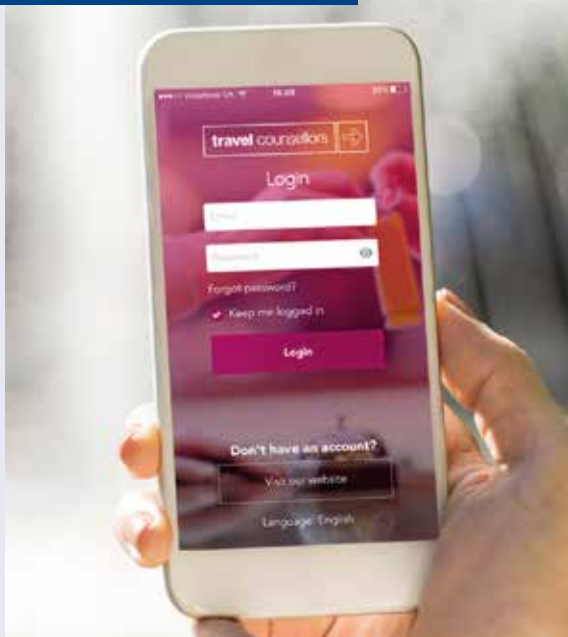
Rian Bornman, founding director of the FlightSite Group, says it's a space he's watching closely.

“We see getting from A to B becoming truly commoditised and a hyper-competitive space where AI will play a significant role. Travel advice on travel planning, however, will remain better served by consultants for the long term in our view,” he says.

Some travel companies, on the other hand, do not believe that chatbots have a role to play in their technology strategy. **Mladen Lukic** of Travel Counsellors, says all technology development by Travel Counsellors is always to enhance the consultants' ability to more accurately service and ultimately achieve a better outcome for their clients.

“It is never to replace a Travel Counsellor in the conversation.”

App a winner!



Travel Counsellors has seen a 20% increase in conversion rate on its 'myTC' customer app, when compared with other digital marketing tools. Internal research has shown that customers are more likely to book after downloading the company's app and receiving the travel quotation on their mobile phone.

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Will the OTA bubble burst?

WITH slick, user-friendly websites and sometimes impossibly low fares and hotel rates, online travel agencies (OTAs) can be a constant thorn in the travel consultant's side – but could the industry be headed for a major shake-up?

Mladen Lukic of Travel Counsellors says he believes that ultimately, there will be just two business models in travel. “Companies that are ultra-effective, but entirely transactional with focus on price and convenience, and companies that excel in managing outcome and therefore provide holistic service focused on trusted relationships.

“There will be types of travel that are obviously more suited to one of the two models but, ultimately, clients will choose, as they do when they buy other goods and services. Both will have to perfect their models and both will have to invest heavily in technology. Anyone left in the middle covering all bases, will cease to exist,” he adds.

While headlines would have you believe that OTAs are killing bricks-and-mortar agencies, similarly, traditional

agents may be guilty of exaggerating and believing that OTAs are on borrowed time, says **Aadil Esack** of XL Travel. “I believe OTAs are here to stay and they are your modern-day competitor. Assuming their collapse is dangerous – it's far better to focus on what you are going to do to counter the threat they present.”

While OTAs are unlikely to disappear from the industry, **Herby Seedat**, chief technical officer of BidTravel, says he believes the way that they operate is likely to change.

“Perhaps one of the disruptions is going to be blockchain and how that is adopted by product owners. Having said that, my view is that it is probably a long-term change. I cannot see product owners being sufficiently flexible to move fast enough.

“Therefore, for now, OTAs will continue to flourish. What they do with ancillaries and fare families is also going to be an interesting space to watch, probably linked to how the NDC space progresses as well,” adds Herby.

How to use predictive analytics to sell more

ONLINE giants like Amazon are well known for the way they use predictive analytics to drive sales. We've all seen the messages that pop up on screen, suggesting products based on previous searches or purchases. Essentially, predictive analytics means profiling users and using these models to predict future behaviour – and this could have a huge impact on the way agents sell travel as well.

In a recent survey, Travelport found that two-fifths of respondents (39%) said they were frustrated when companies didn't use data analytics to provide highly personalised travel recommendations based on their past preferences.

Mladen Lukic of Travel Counsellors says there is a huge opportunity for agencies or consortiums to use similar technology to companies such as Amazon. “Understanding the customer journey is the foundation on which we build all our systems. Every interaction with a client is enhanced by what we have learned from previous interactions,” he says.

“However, the difference with Travel Counsellors,” says Mladen, “is that we maintain long-term relationships that are then unique for each client – whereas a transactional company would look to segment customers into groups to suggest products or services based on a common profile.” He also emphasises that predictive analytics don't just have a role to play as a selling tool but can be used to get to know your client's needs and adapt your service offering in response.



“There needs to be more movement in the incentives involved for an agent to sell ancillaries.”

Riaan van Schoor

Aadil Esack of XL Travel agrees that predictive analytics have a role to play beyond just earning the TMC or agency additional revenue. “We have spent a lot of time investigating and studying predictive analytics, and implementing this technology is a no-brainer as far as we're concerned.” He says, not only can it result in more income, but also help your client by providing them with the best deal, service and journey possible.

But rolling out predictive analytics isn't necessarily a simple process, says **Riaan van Schoor**, CEO of Agentivity. “Whilst this technology is being well used in the retail space, we don't think it's that straightforward

in travel, especially leisure, which is typically a varied buy, and not repetitive.

“Ideally, a traveller goes to a different destination for their next holiday. In the corporate space, travel buying is more repetitive and, yes, we can see predictive analytics playing some role but, again, the travel patterns are based on the buyer's industry, requirements, projects, and so on. All variables come into play,” says Riaan.

Instead, Agentivity believes predictive analytics could work better to predict buying behaviour around elements like advance purchase, delays in providing authorisation to ticket, and so forth. “Analytics to help the agent predict how much work a client might demand from them, and comparing that to the eventual income – being smart and adaptive about how a TMC works with clients,” he says.

While predictive analytics may play some role in an agent earning additional income through the selling of ancillaries, Riaan warns that there needs to be a change in the current model for this to work. “We think there needs to be more movement in the incentives involved for an agent to sell ancillaries – apart from applying service fees to these – sometimes with great difficulty. We're not aware that airlines are over-enthusiastic about paying agents for selling these – so what is the incentive? Again, using predictive analytics to suggest where the sale of an ancillary was a success previously, to ascertain if it's worth pitching it on the next sale, can work,” he adds.

To the point

An updated version of TIC's agent portal, SystemaTIC, which is now 15 years old, is to be released. Besides a clean new look, it includes new features like agent policy management, advanced functions on reporting, as well as the ability to issue a group policy in less than a minute.



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Travel Counsellors launches new dashboard

TRAVEL Counsellors will soon launch a new online tool to enable business owners to finely tune their marketing efforts to appeal to their customers' lifestyle. The customer dashboard has been launched globally and will be released into the SA market "very soon".

The dashboard, which has been designed and built in-house, will allow Travel Counsellors to get an overview of their customer base and identify opportunities to build relationships with those clients who will bring the greatest value to their businesses, recommending tools and techniques to market to them.

The technology behind the dashboard, located in the company's customer management system, segments each Travel Counsellor's contact database, maps their travel interests and logs their booking behaviours to produce customer personas that can be used to target marketing efforts more effectively.

Travel Counsellors' digital strategy and innovation director, **Waseem Haq**, explains: "We use customer data to create a pen portrait or

profile of the customer and put measurable marketing activity, such as social media content or online destination brochures, in place so that our Travel Counsellor franchisees have all the digital tools at their disposal in truly tailor-making marketing efforts to their clients' preferences.

Full visibility

"Each Travel Counsellor will have full visibility of the types of customer personas that sit within their contact centres.

"Ultimately, we are using this insight and data to give them an even more informed view of their customers, which enhances the experience they create and the relationships they build. They are in control of how they keep in touch, but this is an added-value tool to give them even more opportunity to build on the tailor-made service they deliver," adds Waseem.

The dashboard's pool of data is also enhanced by Travel Counsellors' customer preference centre app, an online device that records customer preferences.

Amadeus releases Travel Alerts Notifier

AMADEUS has launched a new product, Amadeus Travel Alerts Notifier (ATAN), that allows travel agents to keep their travellers informed of any changes to their travel plans throughout the entire trip cycle.

Amadeus says independent surveys have shown that more than 80% of passengers would like to stay informed by airlines and airports throughout their journey. "The need for real-time information becomes more pronounced still when the traveller is faced with disruption during the trip," says **Jannine Adams** of Amadeus Southern Africa.

With ATAN, agents can stay connected to their clients and deliver instant, automated alerts of changes to the client's travel plans from the initial booking up to their arrival back home.

ATAN provides several different alerts without any intervention from the agents. These notifications are sent via SMS or email for flight updates affecting clients' schedules, waitlist confirmation, re-seating, cancellation, amongst other changes. It also alerts passengers to airport changes such as boarding gate, baggage carousel, terminal changes or delays.

"For travellers – disruption is personal. It's a missed business meeting or another night away from home at the end of a long business trip. And, it's precisely at these times that the traveller wants immediate answers," she adds.



Photo: Amadeus

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TRAVEL TECHNOLOGY

Did you know?

- Travelport has signed a multi-year agreement with Qantas that includes distribution of the airline's content and integration into Qantas's new NDC platform. Travelport's Rich Content and Merchandising solution has been deployed, giving agents access to images of cabins and meals and the ability to book ancillaries such as extra leg-room seating.
- Agentivity is in the process of rolling out its next-generation platform – Agentivity V3. This new platform is driven by Agentivity's API and allows for a substantial improvement in the user experience and flexibility in how customers can interact with their data. A key enhancement is the merging of reports to offer a far simpler user experience, and the ability for the system to show key metrics to different user types (e.g. management, operations, finance, agent).



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Amazon's voice-controlled Alexa technology is being brought into hotel rooms.

Amazon enters the hospitality world

AMAZON has announced a new offering, Alexa for Hospitality, which will see the company's voice-controlled Alexa technology brought into hotel rooms.

Currently Alexa for Hospitality is only available to providers by invitation, with Marriott International introducing the technology at selected properties in Marriott Hotels, Westin Hotels and Resorts, St Regis Hotels and Resorts, Aloft Hotels and Autograph Collection Hotels from the Northern hemisphere summer.

Guests will be able to use Amazon Echo in their rooms to ask Alexa for information about the hotel, such as the opening hours of the pool, or the location of the gym. Providers will also be able to configure Alexa so that guests can control the lights,

thermostats, blinds, and TVs in their rooms, or even to call the concierge.

Jennifer Hsieh, vp: Customer Experience Innovation, Marriott International, said:

"So many of our guests use voice technology in their home, and we want to extend that convenience to their travel experience. Guests of Charlotte Marriott City Center and Marriott Irvine Spectrum will be among the first to experience a curated list of Alexa for Hospitality features. We will be evaluating guest feedback and adoption to inform how we expand the skills, features and functionality offered through Alexa in our hotels."

Other Marriott properties that will see the introduction of Alexa include: the Cavalier in Virginia Beach, Playa Largo,

EMC2, Ambassador Tulsa, and the Ambassador Wichita, from the Autograph Collection; the Westin, in Buffalo; St Regis, Atlanta, and the Aloft Dublin-Pleasanton, outside San Francisco.

There are also plans to see Alexa for Hospitality provide guests with the option to connect their Amazon account to an Alexa-enabled device in the room, so they can play their own music from apps like Amazon Music or Spotify, or listen to audiobooks from Audible. At check-out, Alexa for Hospitality will automatically disconnect the guest's Amazon account from the in-room device.

Marriott has no immediate plans to roll out the technology to hotels beyond the US, but may do so after gauging guest responses. ■

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Flight Centre Travel Group recently received accreditation from the South African Board of People Practices (SABPP) as a learning provider for its National Certificate in Generic Management. Pictured: Ronel Coetzee, quality assurance manager at the SABPP, handing the certificate of accreditation to Andrew Grunewald, FC business school leader.



Upskilling the industry



Seychelles serendipity

After her client cancelled his trip to Raffles Seychelles, Fazlin Jacobs (pictured) corporate travel manager at executrav, was offered the accommodation, transfers, breakfast and dinner free of charge. With the ocean-view villa too good to pass up, she bought her flights and jetted off to soak up the Seychelles.



Girls' day out

G Adventures recently treated the Development Promotions team to a day of pampering at Life Day Spa followed by high tea at 54 on Bath in Rosebank. (From left): Diana Olivier, sales operations and support; Harshana Parbhoo, product expert; Tasneem Motalib, product expert; Jen Skinner, sales operations and support, all from DP; Sarah O'Mahony, G Adventures sales representative; and Bev Denis, DP product expert.

Appointments

Travelstart has appointed Jerome Touze as chief marketing officer based in Cape Town. Jerome left his role as coo of WAYN.com, part of the Lastminute.com Group,



in March. "Jerome is an online travel pioneer," said Stephan Ekbergh, founder and ceo of Travelstart. "We are making travel simpler for business and leisure travellers in Africa and he brings a mix of creativity and entrepreneurial flair to the mission."

Previously Jerome co-founded travel social networking site WAYN.com

(now part of the LastMinute.com group), where he built the world's largest travel and lifestyle-focused social networking community with over 25 million users. Prior to that he was a senior consultant at Accenture in London where he worked in the communications and high-tech division for clients such as Microsoft and British Telecom.

For the record

Dustin Booyesen is a reservations consultant at Thompsons Holidays, not senior leisure travel consultant at Link Travel as published in last week's TNW. TNW apologises for the error.

Pick of the week

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Changes at TTS

From page 1

retaining existing clients and also looking for opportunities for growth for the American Express Global Business Travel brand.

Wayne told TNW that after managing the Travelit new business sales portfolio, he was looking forward to providing travel

management solutions to TTS's corporate client base.

Regarding the GBT HRG buy-out, Morné said there was no update as the deal was currently sitting with the approval authorities. "Once it has been approved, we will have more information," he said. ■



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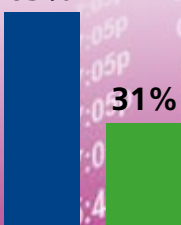


Passengers come before agents

Do airlines inform agents of flight delay/cancellation alternatives after informing passengers?

- Often
- Sometimes
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Discover Dubai



Travel Vision is offering a five-night package at the four-star Four Points by Sheraton Downtown Dubai from R22 902pps between July 1 and August 30. The rate includes return flights and taxes departing Johannesburg, breakfast, return airport transfers, visa, one-day Dubai Park ticket valid for two parks, a desert safari and barbecue dinner. Pictured: Catherine Malama, reservation consultant, Travel Vision. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

Fastjet to launch domestic services by 2019

KYLIE GRANAT AND TESSA REED

FASTJET has received a cash injection of roughly \$10 million (R137m) and has started the process of acquiring Federal Airlines. It hopes to launch domestic services in South Africa by the end of next year.

In the company's final results statement for the year ending December 31, 2017, **Nico Bezuidenhout**, fastjet ceo, said the company approach its

principal shareholders in the weeks leading up to the approval of its financial statements. "I am delighted to say that that they have provided non-binding indications of interest to participate in a further fundraising of not less than \$10 million."

Some of this funding comes from the purchase by Solenta Aviation Holdings Limited of additional Fastjet PLC shares,

The statement further says

that fastjet has commenced the process of exercising its option to acquire Federal Airlines subject to all necessary approvals.

A brand licence agreement with Federal Airlines was implemented last year, which saw fastjet gain access to a South African Airline Operating Certificate with a view to commencing fastjet-branded services in South Africa no later than early 2019, the statement says. ■

Mango joins Amadeus

SARAH ROBERTSON

EFFECTIVE July 4, Mango fare offerings are available for sale for the first time in Amadeus.

Andy Hedley, gm Southern Africa at Amadeus, said in addition to a range of public fares, Mango corporate fares would also be available for sale through Amadeus.

Benediction Zubane, hod marketing and communications for Mango, said Mango's parent company, SAA, already made use of Amadeus and that this decision would lead to more system compatibility between the two airlines.

"We need to implement what the industry is dictating that it needs from us."

Andy said while low-cost carriers had initially begun operations with the intention of working through direct and web booking channels only, a recent spurt of increased GDS offerings from local low-cost carriers made it clear that travel agents were still key sellers of seats in the marketplace.

FlySafair announced last month that it was expanding its GDS offering to reflect its full range of available fares. Previously only high-yield fares have been made available on the GDS.

This is a very different approach to the unfriendly agent strategies that are currently being implemented by a number of international full-service carriers who appear to be moving further and further away from travel agent distribution.

"It is clear that Mango, kulula.com and FlySafair have all started implementing hybrid technological strategies, which is quite a profound move away from the traditional low-cost carrier model. This indicates the reach that agents clearly command and the value that adds in the South African market," said Andy. ■

To the point



Flydubai will close its Open frequent flyer programme and adopt the Emirates Skywards scheme in its place, effective August 1. Open points can be redeemed against future Flydubai services until July 31, or members can opt to manually convert their miles at a rate of one Skywards mile for every two Open points. Points that are not redeemed or exchanged for Skywards miles before the end of the month, will be converted into a Flydubai voucher and sent to the member's registered email address on August 1.