

ABC's of a Successful Travel Advisor



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Now more than ever, the traveling public has learned the value of a professional advisor. By having high standards and level of service in every aspect of your business, you will convey to your clients how valuable your services are.

Here are tips to keep your travel business thriving. Keep them handy for regular reference. These tips won't go out of style. You'll find them powerful tools not just for today but tomorrow and well into the future.

- Have a business plan. Once you establish a vision and the direction of your travel company, it will provide structure and keep you on course.
- Identify your market and develop strategies to reach them.
- Always be thinking of ways to promote your company and yourself. Set a goal to talk about your company at least 4 times a week.
- Be active in your community. Get involved in silent auctions and other fundraisers where you can get your name in front of residents. Set up speaking engagements with local Rotary Clubs, libraries and schools.
- Use your social media to inspire travelers. Post new content and promote it via (opt-in) e-letters.
- Use social media strategically. Develop a campaign, rather than just randomly posting photos, comments. For example, one week, devote all postings to summer travel; another to African safaris.
- Give yourself daily deadlines. By having deadlines, you force yourself to be more productive.
- Specialize. You can be a generalist, but at the same time have some specialties that are magnets for new clients. Once the word gets out that you are an expert on certain destinations (the Caribbean, India, South America) or certain types of travel (cruises, adventure travel) you'll have a natural flow of inquiries.
- Treat every client like your business depends on it.
- Get back to clients *quickly*.
- If possible, meet clients in person.
- Be a good listener and be curious.
- Product knowledge. Clients want to know you know your stuff.
- Always have an upbeat attitude when communicating with clients.
- Be consistent and show that you are responsible.
- Be patient...no matter what.
- Don't talk too much. Let them talk.
- Forms: Have a very comprehensive traveler's profile on file for every client and revisit annually (should have passport details, dietary preferences, allergies, etc).
- Have a checklist of what documents go to a client and when. Traveler's Profiles, credit card authorizations, trip insurance waivers, etc.
- Stay up to date with technology. Provide clients with travel information, itineraries in the newest forms available unless they prefer more traditional methods. Find out how they want to stay connected. Do they use WhatsApp? What about Mobile Passport?
- Always find out what's essential for clients. Pools? AC? King beds? Large rooms?

- Celebrations. Clients will often tell you it's an anniversary or graduation trip. But be proactive—if you are aware of something coming up (because of previous conversations), mention it. And always let the suppliers know. Keep track and send cards, a note or email. You can get creative with this: Baby Moons, Empty Nest Trips...
- Pay attention to world challenges and have sensitivity when making suggestions. Make it your business to keep abreast of what's happening and how to keep your business away from it.
- No job too small. Someone just wants a half-day private guided tour in London for a family of four? Take it. It will give you an opportunity to show your skills and they may come back for a more elaborate trip.
- Process requests quickly after receiving them. Important to get the ball rolling.
- Don't be rigid about itineraries you may design. Even if you love your plan, if a client shows they want something different, you must be flexible.
- Before a client travels, offer to go over the itinerary day by day on the phone or in person.
- Keep in touch with clients when they are traveling. Don't only be there for the bad news.
- Be reachable 24/7 or have a backup. Be ready to pivot and make changes as needed. An example would be if a tour is rained out, contact the service provider to change the tour to another day.
- Keep in touch with clients throughout the year. Send post cards, short e-mails...
- Suggest a 5-year travel plan for all your clients. This is something you can sit down and develop with them, considering budget, ages, interests, etc.
- Talk about budget early in the process and convey your commitment to get them maximum value within their budget.
- Keep abreast of rates of exchanges and foreign currency. If the South African rand is weak against the USD, use it as a great selling point.
- Be up to date on international news and have opinions on how you feel about certain events. If a client brings up a country that has had terrorist attacks, how do you respond? How do you react to news that's misleading? Evaluating a country by what you see in the news is like seeing a room through a keyhole. Make it your business to understand the whole picture.
- Sell trip insurance but unless you're an insurance expert, encourage your clients to ask specific questions to the insurance providers.
- Get feedback from clients after a trip and share it with partners and suppliers that you worked with.
- Collect testimonials and share them through social media outlets.
- Encourage clients to refer friends. We all know that word of mouth is the best advertising you can have.
- Follow up with clients...*always*.
- Keep up to date on holidays in destinations you're likely to sell. For example, know when Tet is happening in Vietnam. Know when to go and when NOT to go to certain places.
- Don't multi-task. This is when mistakes happen.
- Don't send e-mails late at night. Always proofread in the morning with clear eyes.
- Make sure your e-mails, your itineraries and other documents are error-proof. These are reflections of you and they show how well you pay attention to details.
- Attend trade shows and travel events but choose them wisely. Ask yourself how many you can reasonably attend every year and whether you need to go back to the same ones each year.
- Take available vendor trainings online or onsite.
- Cultivate business contacts whenever you can. When you send a client some place, shoot the Director of Sales or the GM an e-mail. Draw attention to the fact that you're a fan of their property.
- Travel smartly. Every year, identify the places you need to visit to be up to date for your clients and get to them.
- When traveling, have as many experiences as you can, so that you can effectively sell them to your clients. Take the gladiator lessons in Rome. Walk the walls of Dubrovnik. Spend the night in a ryokan in Japan, a riad in Morocco, a pousada in Portugal.