

LET'S GET BACK TO MAKING THE TRAVEL AGENT YOUR ALLY IN BOOSTING SALES

We do not hear any more talk about it, or see much more of the sales action being involved with getting travel agents to book business with our hotels. The travel agent, once a useful figure to the hotelier, could even be more useful today than ever before. Business is off and we need all the help we can get.

The travel agent today is still very much in business with the handling of a wide variety of arrangements for the business traveler as well as the leisure traveler. There are probably over a half a million companies, along with a large number of federal agencies that have travel agents handle their needs----everything from finding their most reasonable and appropriate air travel and lodging arrangements to booking conferences and meetings. Agents, of course, are into heavily booking cruises, for leisure travelers, but also for companies, and a variety of social groups. Group incentive travel is another important area for today's agent. The complicated arrangements required fit right in with what an agent does best: handling the challenge of countless schedules, rate structures and conditions.

The travel agent's income depends solely from commissions earned as a result of bookings on behalf of a client by handling its travel needs. Of course, we know that the airlines cut back on paying commissions on travel some years ago, but for groups they are still offering commissions. Agents also represent hundreds of wholesalers and tour operators by booking their clients on special land packages all over the world. There are some local hoteliers that have been very successful in going after this kind of business. Lucille Yokel, Director of Sales and Marketing at The Wellington Hotel in New York City has recently been back from a very successful European trip visiting with agents, and is now preparing for trips to visit with travel agents and operators in China and Japan. A recent familiarization trip to her hotel by Chinese representatives proved to be very worthwhile. Hannah Zulueta, Director of Sales and Marketing for Tapestry Resorts, out of California, has been working with travel agents to help with the booking of their tour packages via tour operators and wholesalers for Tapestry's 17 properties they operate.

Popular approaches of going after the travel agent market include: Selling directly by phone, personal visits or phone calls; Internet marketing via e-mail flyers and messages; Packaging a property with other travel components and marketing it via a wholesaler or tour operator; Connecting with Wholesales who are already selling packages within your area; Participating in trade shows geared to travel agents; Getting connected to travel agents via the variety of social and business networks; Participate in or create social travel networking groups.

However, no matter how you approach this subject of going after travel agents, it certainly would be worthwhile for any property to consider spending a portion of the sales effort time in this market area.