

4 things travel agents can do to stay relevant in 2024

By Kirby Gordon

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There was a point not so long ago when the future of travel agents seemed somewhat uncertain. The rise of online travel agencies and travel booking websites, coupled with a massive increase in the amount of information that anyone with a smartphone and an internet connection can access, means that many are now planning trips themselves.



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However, recent data shows an uptick in foot traffic at travel agencies, with both leisure and corporate clients increasingly favouring face-to-face advice. I believe that this resurgence is a testament to the fact that people are still keen to leverage the tailored expertise and value that travel agencies offer; especially in today's highly interconnected – and complex – world.

So, what's driving this change and what can travel agents do to ensure they capitalise on the trend? I've unpacked a few ideas below.

1. Minimise complexity

While the pandemic was devastating to the travel trade, it allowed travel agents to really showcase their value and again position themselves as trusted travel advisors and experts. While much of the complexity that came with the early days of post-pandemic travel is thankfully behind us, disruptions and delays do still happen. As such, travel agents must always drive the message that they are available to assist should something go wrong at any time.

2. Do the comparative shopping for your customers

With so many different options out there, it's quite easy for consumers to miss out on bargains. One of the major benefits of visiting a travel agency is that agents do comparative shopping for their customers, weighing up different itineraries and route options to find the best deal. Agents need to showcase to their customers that whatever they put together is a bespoke offering and has been thoroughly researched based on their needs and preferences.

3. Ask the right questions and do the necessary research to find the best fit

Taking the above point a step further, travel agents typically have a lot more knowledge about different destinations than the average traveller and must use this to their advantage if they want to showcase their value. By this I mean that they need to profile their customers, ask them various questions and explain why they are doing so.

Agents need to be clear that they are asking questions so that they can make the most informed recommendation. It's all about putting together the best holiday, at the best price, based on the customer's likes and dislikes, their hobbies, and their non-negotiables. In 2024, this informed, personalised service is key. Here, it's also important to mention that tough economic times mean that consumers are more price-sensitive than ever before. Agents have to be conscious of this and help them to get the best bang for their buck.

4. Get back to business

And it's not only leisure travel that's surged in the wake of the pandemic. Business travel is also rebounding faster than expected. The Global Business Travel Association now anticipates that business travel spending will return to pre-pandemic levels this year, rather than its previous estimate of 2026.

Where companies used to have an in-house travel person, they are increasingly outsourcing this function to travel agencies. For modern agents, understanding some of the particulars around business travel is a must. For example, it's a good idea to ask a business traveller if there's a chance that their meetings could run over time and, if the answer is yes, to rather book a flexible ticket so that their flights can easily be changed if need be.

All of these trends are great for the travel trade. Now, the challenge is for the industry to continue showcasing its value so that it can capitalise on these positive developments and cement its role in the value chain to maintain, and grow its customer base.

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