How to Become a Travel Agent

ASTA’s Young Professionals Society
YPS Webinar Wednesdays
March 3, 2010
Moderated by Jason Coleman  CTC, ECCS, CLS, LCS, DS

- Entered industry 1998 as a meeting planner
- Switched to leisure sales in 2003
- Graduate of West L.A. College and George Washington Univ.
- Specialize in theme cruise groups
- Chair of ASTA’s YPS and Vice President of SoCalASTA
Welcome Samira Platter

- Interned at Travel Agency and graduated from travel school
- Started as a leisure travel agent—4 agencies and 1 Caribbean tour operator
- Job function is travel agency manager
- Favorite destination is Europe
Welcome Robbi Hamida (CTA, DS)

- Director of Agent Development at Nexion
- Got hooked on travel at the age of 16
- Also worked with an airline, leisure agency, corporate agency and agency owner
Travel Careers

• The idea that the travel industry is glamorous is just hype.

–MYTH or REALITY?
88% of travel agents say they are happy in their current positions.

Source: The Travel Institute’s 2006 Salary and Compensation Survey.
Travel Careers

- A career in travel means a life working at low pay.

–MYTH or REALITY?
How Much Do Travel Agents Earn?

- The average travel agent salary is $30,458
  - 44.3% of agents are compensated by salary alone
  - 26.7% are compensated by a combination of salary and commission
  - 29% are paid by commission
- The average starting salary is $20,912
- The average managerial salary is $37,944

Source: ASTA’s 2008 Labor and Compensation Study
Travel Careers

• You can’t get a job in travel without experience.

–MYTH or REALITY?
Travel Careers

- People in the travel industry don’t get to travel.

–MYTH or REALITY?
Why Become a Travel Agent?

- Passion for travel
- Personally rewarding – fulfilling dreams
- Exciting and evolving business environment
- Lots of room for creative and analytical types
- Room for advancement within travel industry
Want to be Your Own Boss?

- There’s a ton of money to be made in travel!
- Starting your own travel agency
- Becoming an independent contractor
What Does a Travel Agent Do?

- Advise clients and provide recommendations and information
- Research destinations and supplier products
- Assist and find alternatives
- You’re the consumer advocate
What About Niches?

- Types of travel: corporate, leisure, cruise, air, tours, space, luxury
- Destinations: countries, regions
- Consumer Groups: students, professionals, seniors, GLBT, families
- Interests/Themes: weddings/honeymoons, safari, social clubs, religious, adventure
What are the Essential Skills?

• Interpersonal relationships
  – Understand their client’s needs and communicate that understanding
  – Empathy, enthusiasm, patience, positive outlook

• Language
  – Ability to speak and write clearly
  – Additional languages are a huge advantage!
What are the Essential Skills?

• Basic math
  – Calculating basic fares and rates, currencies/measurements, time zones

• Technology
  – Comfort with office technology
  – Frequent use of internet and email to communicate and research

• Ability to learn
  – Routines and procedures, changing facts and skills
Aren’t Travel Agents All Gone?

- Heck no – we’re evolving!
- But can’t you do it all online yourself?
Where Do You Start?

- Travel Schools
  - www.asta.org
  - www.thetravelinstitute.com
  - Local community colleges
- Travel and Tourism Scholarships
  - www.tourismcares.org
- Local Travel Agencies
- Associations like ASTA, NACTA, CLIA
- Other Innovative Ways
Beware of the Quick Fixes

• Professional travel agents invest in product and sales training, ongoing education
• Buying a website is not becoming a travel agent.
• An ID card does not make a travel agent!
A Great Place to Start

- American Society of Travel Agents (ASTA)
  - “How to Become a Travel Agent” e-book
- Future Travel Professionals Club
- ASTA’s Young Professionals Society
  - www.facebook.com/astayyps
  - www.asta.org/yps
Upcoming YPS Webinar Wednesdays

• Today's GDS -- It's Not Your Grandma's CRS (April 7)
• The In's and Out's of Host Agencies (May 5)
• Making Cruising Work for You (June 9)