

Travel Agent 20/20: Clarity for a Bright Future

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Propelling Travel Technology

Trisept Solutions brings innovative travel merchandising and distribution solutions to travel merchants around the globe. It has grown rapidly since its founding in 2000 and now serves the biggest names in travel, including airlines, hotels and resorts, destinations, tour operators and other travel merchants who rely on it for sophisticated solutions to complex challenges.

Its *Synapse* enterprise operating platform delivers advanced merchandising solutions to travel providers, enabling merchants to synchronize omni-channel distribution, supplier connectivity, customer service and back-office functions on one secure and seamless platform.

VAX VacationAccess is the leading travel agent portal in the US, bringing together 70,000 travel agents with leading leisure travel suppliers, making it the premier platform for travel agents to expertly research, market and sell vacations to their clients.

Introduced in 2015, *Xcelerator* is a revolutionary travel technology that seamlessly integrates all the functions that travel agents need to service their clients and efficiently run their business on one secure platform. Its *Discover* advanced trip-planning functionality is a cognitive computing platform powered by WayBlazer, an IBM Watson Ecosystem Partner focused on travel solutions.

Trisept Solutions employs 165 dedicated professionals and is headquartered in Milwaukee with an office in Dallas.

To learn more about Trisept Solutions, please visit triseptsolutions.com.



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Travel agents who only communicate with customers about destinations and trip details, plan vacations based on assumptions about what their customers might like and attribute success to the number of “likes” they get on Facebook are not ready for 2020.

They are going to be left behind. Far behind.

Here's why: In 2020, truly successful travel agents will be doing things very differently than they do today, seizing opportunities unimaginable in the past. For years, customers have come to agents for their travel intelligence – everything a customer needs to know about travel. Tips and information about destinations. Learning about the hottest deals. Details about airline and hotel policies. What should they pack. They have been told to share this information on a website or via Facebook or Twitter. They go to conferences to gain even deeper knowledge about destinations near and far, pick up tips on how to market themselves or learn how to set up a CRM.

That way of thinking just won't cut it when the clock strikes midnight on December 31, 2019. With so many advances in technology, the value of an agent's travel intelligence will actually diminish. What this means is that to be ready for 2020, agents need to shift from a reliance on travel intelligence to a new way of thinking.

To thrive tomorrow, agents first need to know a whole lot more about their customers. They need to go well beyond a customer's travel preferences. They need to gain a better understanding of how people live their lives and how they interact with the world around them. They need a deeper appreciation of a customer's longing for an authentic experience. They need to feel the great emotional investment people make in their vacation where so much reward is expected in return.

We believe that the agent's emotional intelligence is a huge asset often overlooked. Emotional intelligence allows the travel agent to get so close to the customer, all that agent has to do is whisper. It flips the conversation from selling to buying, to a journey of finding amazing new options that neither of them thought about before they started their conversation. It allows customers to sell themselves.

Agents who combine their travel intelligence and customer intelligence with the right intuitive technology will open the door to the next level of intelligence. We call it Genuine Intelligence. It means a new set of priorities for the travel agent. From the agent's old ways of communicating to the customer's preferred way of interacting. And from legacy systems to new technologies that streamline the workflow.

"One of the most important elements of communication between a travel professional and their customer is what the agent hears that isn't actually said. Utilizing Genuine Intelligence enables agents to uncover even more information to better understand their customer's needs and desires to make their travel dreams a reality."

- Joanie Ogg, CTC, MCC, Co-Founder, Ogg Marketing Group

Genuine Intelligence can take the travel agent to the land of opportunity: more qualified leads, a higher close rate, higher spend per customer and greater loyalty over time. Genuine Intelligence starts with a change in the conversation. From knowing a lot about how to get people to a destination to knowing what makes a person tick.

It means asking different questions, questions they haven't thought of before. Instead of asking "Where would you like to go and what do you want to do?" the agent now asks "How would you like to feel, what does renewal mean to you? Does it mean you want a deeper understanding of the world, learn something new, reconnect with your loved ones?"

Freed from the limits of travel intelligence, the agent taps into people's dreams and is able to offer options customers didn't even realize they wanted. The possibilities become endless and more profitable.

"Smart, professional travel agents may find themselves in greater demand in 2020 than today. That's because travelers age 18 to 34 show the most interest in working with professional travel agents. Why? The agents can provide the insight, context and guidance these travelers crave but can't find online."

- Henry Harteveldt , Founder/Travel Industry Analyst
Atmosphere Research Group

Genuine Intelligence means a focus on the types of customers the agent is great at engaging. The agent develops a reputation and a following for knowing the best vacation options for a certain type of customer's life stage or mindset regardless of age. This sets the stage for referrals from customers who've found their agent to be exceptional at mindreading.

The successful agent of the future adapts to how customers want to engage. One day, a customer could be a young person who uses the phone, makes an appointment and visits the travel professional's office. The next day, it could be a mature Boomer who prefers video chat and a meeting at Starbucks. Or a mother who only uses a messaging app late at night. The most profitable agents won't categorize how people want to engage by their generation; they will ask, and be ready to adapt totally to 24/7 engagement from beginning to end, and over again.

After all, who but the travel agent can gain the insight that comes from knowing a customer's fondest dream? Who but the travel agent knows how and when a customer wants to engage and what type of content will answer a question or turn a traveler on to a new idea? Who but the travel agent can plan a truly complex vacation for tomorrow's more sophisticated traveler?

"I have heard people predicting the demise of the travel agent for decades now, so it is refreshing that the conversation is moving toward the strengthening and increase in influence of the travel agent. It is easy to see how travel agents who embrace the concept of Genuine Intelligence and effectively bring it to life for their customers will thrive in the fast-changing environment we face."

- Andy Stuart, President and Chief Executive Officer
Norwegian Cruise Line

Finally, to bring Genuine Intelligence to life in their business, agents have to reach forward. They have to exploit new technology to help them streamline the research and booking process and work more efficiently, spending less time putting the pieces together and more time serving customers with the perfect answer to their fondest dreams. It frees the travel agent to find more of the right customers to build a loyal following for years to come.

This technology is light years ahead of what most agents are using today but will be readily available in the near future. We are now able to harness the power of the world's most sophisticated artificial intelligence platform to serve the travel agent's need for speed and accuracy. Imagine taking

"Augmenting human intelligence is at the heart of this new way of computing. Previously, computing provided tools that let us do things better or faster. Artificial Intelligence can help us do things we hadn't thought of doing before."

- Felix Laboy, Chief Executive Officer, WayBlazer

that kind of power away from the OTAs and putting it the capable hands of travel professionals, where it belongs. This technology platform will power the career of the future, a job made easier, yet more rewarding than ever.

Most of all, Genuine Intelligence means clarity. Fewer false starts. Less confusion. More precision with planning a trip and getting it right with the customer. A clear view of the options on the travel agent's screen, in high resolution. A clear understanding of where the travel agent's business is today and where it could go in the future.

Yes, the conversation is changing. Where yesterday we told the travel agent: “You have to know your stuff and do these things to be successful.” Today we’re saying, “You need more than travel intelligence, you have to deeply understand your customer; you have to have Genuine Intelligence—powered by you and new technology—to take you to the next level, or be left behind.”

“Genuine Intelligence is the essential ingredient that guarantees a travel agent will never become obsolete by emerging artificial intelligence platforms. It puts the travel professional in the driver’s seat of the bus instead of being run over by it.”

- John Ische, President, Trisept Solutions

The good news is: Only a travel agent can unleash the power of Genuine Intelligence – true, human intelligence fueled by the travel agent’s passion, with technology as the servant, and not the master.