Hospitality Supply Chain - Part II

The Challenges of Navigating Through the Hospitality Supply Chain - Part II.

In a previous edition, I listed the various channels that make up the Hospitality Supply Chain (See **Publisher's Notes** - **Hospitality Supply Chain - Part I**). The response to the list, and what people have experienced as they have traveled through some of the channels, was very interesting. The consensus was that information is definitely at a maximum, that concise and accurate information is at a minimum, and that continuity of information through the various channels was at a loss.

So, where is the problem with navigating through the Hospitality Supply Chain? Well when I started this series (Part 1), I said that it would be a multi-part series; I did not say it would be a trilogy. The answer to this could be a story that is long, detailed, and with many twists and turn, as well as many different perspectives, so my focus will be on providing an abridged version of where I see the problem and a solution, which will also include feedback from Luxury Experience Magazine readers.

There are many different challenges, but I believer that none is bigger than the abundant amount of information and misinformation. In many cases, each of the different channels, in their own right, believes they are projecting the correct information, or at least as it pertains to their specific business position. What use to be a more encompassing business solution by a travel agent or tour operator who would contract the airline tickets, arrange the ground handling, book and confirm the hotels as well as other related itinerary requirements, has now transitioned to where a traveler is looking to assemble their own itineraries from discrete components. This is mainly because they can; they now have the power of the Internet to converse with people around the world, 'search and sift' through details on the Internet at a rate and detail level that they never did, with respect to all those fancy print brochures provided by the travel agents.

I feel that the component that is lacking is the consistency and ownership of the information, for example, a tour operator will painstakingly proofread their many brochures as they are printed usually once or maybe twice a year due to the cost of printing which is still high. The operators and agents live or die on the accuracy of the material, as well as they have established a relationship with the products they support with regards to price, thus they can feel secure with the printed information. So, what does the Internet bring to us? We all have been informed, by some persistent marketing, that the Internet has opened the door to dynamic pricing, dynamic information, and dynamic inventory allocation by airlines, hotels, cruise lines, etc. 'challenging' us to 'search and sift' for that next great deal.

Well, with a dynamic environment comes two major problem areas: 1) The Internet is unforgiving with respect to information in that information you posted from 4 weeks to 4 years ago may still be 'searchable' and retrieved by an unsuspecting surfer; 2) Information that is posted, though it is the latest information, may have errors that are not found until someone, and in many cases it is a customer, complains, and by then the information may have been archived which means that someone could potentially retrieve the information under the first scenario. Dynamic updating also leads, in some cases, to less proofreading and reviewing of the information prior to posting due to deadlines or reactionary marketing. This could mean that the information you are referencing under a 'search and sift' may be old, incorrect or just plain irrelevant.

The nature of the Internet is control; people have embraced this medium as much for the limitless information as for the total control they have in what they read, and when they read it. We have heard countless psychological views on what has made the Internet the success it is, but I like to quantify it under freedom of choice and personal control. The best deal for one person may be not enough 'searching and sifting' for another, and both results are considered successful by the individuals making the decision. I have found that focusing on one area and looking for collaborative information on critical elements is the only way I feel comfortable about my Internet decisions. In some cases, I check the date that the article from my 'search and sift' was written, but if there is no date then I go to the search results and check out the 'cached' button to see when the article was picked up by the search engine you are using. One of the easiest ways to feel comfortable is your familiarization with the website, but let me warn you that the two scenarios mentioned previously can creep up on even the best known websites. Information that is just a click away will continue to exist, and in fact will grow at an exponential rate. Therefore, though we found information, we need to use our basic instincts and collaborate the information (price, times, locations,

contacts, etc.) with other search results before making a decision. With regards to the travel component, a tour operator or travel agent may be an excellent point of collaboration for times, locations, contacts and price, as they should have access to the same information, and sometimes more, than you found.

Our desire for freedom of choice and personal control are essential to the growth of the Internet. We must though remain a bit cautious as we 'search and sift' through the mounds of information at our mouse click finger tips.

May your navigating be safe, rewarding and fun; until next month!

I thank you for your continued support of Luxury Experience Magazine, and as always, your comments are welcome, so please send comments to publisher@luxuryexperience.com.

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