

Worldspan becomes first GDS to use VFM to distribute stills & rich media

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VFM Interactive announced today that Worldspan will enhance its content for travel agencies and eCommerce sites by adding VFM's distribution feed of still images and rich media for thousands of hotel properties.

Worldspan becomes VFM's first global distribution system (GDS) distribution partner, adding to a network of thousands of travel sites and signaling an important development in what is already the largest and fastest-growing online media distribution network in the travel industry.

'Using VFM, we'll be able to provide our agency partners with a powerful source of visual marketing material supporting our hotel partners,' says Ninan Chacko, senior vice president of eCommerce and product planning for Worldspan. 'They'll be able to provide content such as videos or virtual tours to their clients directly from Trip Manager XE and, in the future, from the agency's desktop tools, enabling agents to provide superior value to their customers.'

The Worldspan-VFM partnership will be first brought to life in an update to Trip Manager XE, which Worldspan is previewing at the NBTA conference in San Diego, August 14th to 17th. Trip Manager XE is marketed through Worldspan's travel agency partners and allows business travelers to self-book their travel directly. As a result of the VFM-Worldspan partnership, Trip Manager XE users will get to see and experience amenities and features of the hotel properties through the integration of VFM's pictures, videos and virtual tours.

Worldspan is also planning to integrate VFM's rich media into its other tools available to travel agency and eCommerce sites.

'Worldspan is already recognized as the leader in airline fares and pricing and eCommerce distribution technology,' continued Chacko, 'By partnering with VFM, we are continuing to be on the forefront of providing value-added services and content to our customers.'

VFM sees Worldspan's decision as an innovative move that may well be followed by others. 'The internet has changed the playing field, affecting how travel is sold both online and offline,' says Paolo Boni, CEO and President of VFM. 'We're delighted that Worldspan has taken a leadership role in the GDS industry. No question, travel agents need to have at their fingertips marketing material that is as good as, if not better, than consumers can find themselves.'

Certainly, 2005 has become the tipping point for rich media as broadband penetration now outnumbers dial-up access in American homes. Advertisers are recognizing the growing consumer demand for video as technology allows for near-instant load times, turning a computer screen practically into a TV screen. According to a new study released by PricewaterhouseCoopers, rich media spending will 'climb from \$36.7 billion 2005 to \$54.2 billion in 2009.' Quoted in AdAge, Peter Petrusky, PricewaterhouseCooper's Director of Advisory Services who provided expertise on the study's internet section explained, 'People now expect speed and rich media online.'

Just as hotels have begun to embrace this thinking, Worldspan's partnership with VFM indicates other important players in travel are as well.

About VFM Interactive

VFM Interactive is the leading distributor and producer of rich media content for the lodging and travel industry. Operating the largest and fastest-growing distribution network, VFM enables hotels to maximize their presence online using the power of rich media on more than 5,000 travel and travel-related sites where consumers are researching and purchasing travel products. In addition to sites such as Travelocity, Orbitz, Priceline and TripAdvisor, VFM's distribution network also includes major search engines and will shortly include both meta-search and GDSs. VFM also produces a variety of rich media marketing content including videos, 360° virtual tours and Flash productions. VFM's clients include over 3,000 hotels and resorts from brands and management companies such as Best Western, Choice, Crowne Plaza, Hilton, Holiday Inn, Interstate, Marriott, MGM, Outrigger, Radisson, Regent, Sheraton, W, Westin, and Wyndham properties.

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