

Technology Pressures Agents in 'Big Boys' Game

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Traditional travel agents are battling to hold their ground during the 'online revolution'.

Panellists at the 55th Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) Annual Conference April 26 plenary session on "Making Sense of Technological Trends" addressed the travel agents' role in the Internet age.

Zuji CEO Mr Scott Blume said: "The move to online is unstoppable." He said it lowers costs, and gives control to consumers and power to brands.

Pacific World Managing Director Mr Bob Guy referred to the "delivery end of the business", stating that plenty of opportunities still exist for travel agents, due to the need for a "contact point".

Pertlink Managing Director Mr Terrence Ronson said: "E is for easy."

He said consumers directly communicating with their travel agents can make and confirm flight and accommodation bookings within 10 minutes via e-mail and mobile phones.

ZTS Information Systems General Manager Mr Michael Zartmann said the travel industry needed to "aggregate fragmented content" and be "just-in-time applicable".

Amadeus Asia Pacific Vice President e-Commerce Mr Peter Smith, who moderated the session, asked what travel agents can do to survive in a "big boys' game".

Mr Guy suggested looking at distributors' strategies, carefully evaluating several distribution channels and providing an electronic means of communication.

Mr Ronson said agents should provide online booking capability, and warned hotels to "be careful where you put your inventory - avoid the mess - and don't lose control of the channel".

Attending delegates addressed the panel concerning several topics:

- œ How to rate destination experiences via the Internet
- œ PATA's "dot.travel" initiative
- œ Copyright issues
- œ Growth in FIT and avoiding confusion in tailor-made package tours
- œ Reducing costs vs. losing control
- œ Search engine technology
- œ E-payments.

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