

'I still see significant upside for online travel companies in the US' - Orbitz's Aaron Cooper

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As per the industry estimates, the market is expected to touch \$146 billion by 2010.

According to **Aaron Cooper, VP Online Marketing, Orbitz Worldwide**, there would be different answers across the board pertaining to the maturity level of domestic online travel market.

"Sure domestic growth is slower than was a few years ago - but that hasn't prevented a number of new players from launching sites and more are still popping up. I still see significant upside for online travel companies in the US. The fact is that no matter how many sites there are out there - you still need to consumate your booking at a supplier or an online travel company like orbitz.com," he said.

"So when I talk about "your value spectrum", I'm talking picking justifiable levels of investment, brand and direct marketing budget that fit your business plans. Once you have this, the next step is to set the right goals - from search engine marketing to social media to brand - and leave it to your company's experts in these areas to deliver," added Cooper, who is scheduled to speak at **EyeforTravel's Online Marketing in Travel 2008 Conference** scheduled to take place in **Chicago on 25-26 June this year**.

On building brands in a relatively mature travel market like the US, Cooper told EyeforTravel.com's Ritesh Gupta, "As for the Americas, I can tell you that it is three things you need to do better than your competition in an industry that is as relatively mature as ours in the US:

- 1) Ensuring a steady drum beat of innovation,
- 2) Understanding and capitalizing on new ways customers search for travel,
- 3) Ensuring that you are always mindful of the dollar-in, dollar-out approach as you measure the "ROI" of your online marketing programs."

Considering Orbitz's senior management background, which predominantly has come from the financial rank or role, can one stress on "Making your CFO your biggest advocate?"

On this, he said, "I'd amend that to your CFO and CEO. As someone who preaches financial modeling and measurement, I'm lucky to have a CEO who comes from that CFO background. Steve Barnhart has been a strong advocate in what we have accomplished in the online marketing space, and his support has been invaluable," said Cooper.

Getting your CFO on board is paramount, however, if for no other reason than they control the budget!, according to Cooper. "And if you can speak to a CFO in his or her own language, demonstrating that your measured efforts are revenue drivers vs. Losers, then online marketing programs will continue to be funded. For most groups, it is really that simple."

"In our case, we take it to another level - our finance team can quickly spit back our marketing investment strategy in their own words - and this understanding leads to trust - and allows us to be very aggressive with our actions," he said.

For more information about **EyeforTravel's Online Marketing in Travel 2008 Conference**, Chicago, 25-26 June, click here: www.eyefortravel.com/smusa or contact Helen Raff: helen@eyefortravel.com

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