

The Role of the Travel Agent

by

ERIC GRIMES

(Day & Grimes Travel Pty. Ltd.)

The travel agent not only has a responsibility and a relationship to his principal; the resort operator, tour operator, the airline, the coach operator; he also has a responsibility to his client.

To ensure the travel agent satisfies this client responsibility he must know the product. It is amazing how few Australian travel agents really know the product. There is a need for the entrepreneur, the resort owner, the airline, to develop more person to person contact with the travel agent. For example, better and more informed brochures that describe the resort, and small visual aid presentations. Eighty six percent of the tourists come into this area by motor car. The motorists and the caravaner are a very large proportion of our Queensland domestic market.

I believe a good number of tourists have failed to even contemplate a holiday on the coast and the Great Barrier Reef because they have been caught up in the philosophy that cheap package tours can only be bought if it is in association with airline transportation. There are many resort owners here today who would welcome the opportunity of providing a slightly discounted rate to encourage people to occupy the many beds they have vacant at any one given time. I find it very hard to understand why the book of coupons travel component mentioned by the consultant from Grace Bros. Travel has not yet been developed in Australian domestic travel.

How many people are there on the roads who leave Sydney, get to a travel agent office in Nambour and haven't any idea where the Great Barrier Reef is? Having made it from Sydney and Melbourne, they think the Great Barrier Reef starts at Maroochydore or Caloundra. If they get as far as Gladstone, we snare them and answer their questions, "How can I get to the Great Barrier Reef and over to Heron?", and we send them. Of course it is not easy to get to Heron. Perhaps the helicopters are a little too expensive for the family man. Well, where then do they go? Mackay. That's the next place, and of course we wouldn't dare tell them about the bad roads between Rockhampton and Mackay, for indeed many would never get there. So why don't we sell them these package coupon ideas? I'm sure that it presents an opportunity for us. There's terrific potential to be developed.

The independent resort operator needs to seek out travel marketeers who are selling to special interest groups of people. The travel agent knows his own market best. He knows what happens in Brisbane, Nambour and Gladstone. He is a member of the 'club'; he sees his friends every week and there is a group of people who want to go to Brampton Island and the airline package doesn't suit everybody. Why then can't we do something about developing a new and untapped market? Why can't the travel agent network of Australia have access to the tour basing fares? Here are opportunities that exist for travel agents to develop new programs that will put people into your resorts. I believe too that the well-known weekend jaunts and junkets where food and drink flow freely, should be reviewed. We ought to let learning prevail with worthwhile working seminars of selected agents ready to work a lot and then perhaps play a little. One good example is the group of travel consultants being sponsored to this workshop by Grace Bros. Travel.

The second thing I want to talk about is communication: communications up, down, crossways, whichever way you like. As long as we make sure that we get the facts of what is going on. You know, we do live in a modern age! What about using the Telex Machine that is in your office, Mr Operator? It's possible to send out multi-messages on telexes these days. Did you know that? Did you know that you could send a multi-message to the travel agents around Australia and you can tell them that next week you have 50 beds you want to get rid of? Have you ever thought about communicating in that way? Goodness me! We get a lot of information on our telex machine that we just pick up and throw in the waste-paper basket. But I can assure you that if you took the trouble to tell us what's going on in your area, we would perhaps pick up some of that information and try and do something to sell people your way. It needs a little bit of sophistication, I know. It needs some developing.

Communication is something that we are all very interested in, and I applaud and commend the very successful Talk-About, the brain-child of the Australian Federation of Travel Agents, who, 4 years ago in association with ANTA, developed this concept. Here seller and the provider get together and take the opportunity to discuss across the table the various resorts, facilities and services that one has to offer the other. Have you heard about Talk-About? Do you know what Talk-About is all about? What about a Talk-a-Reef? What about the operators on the Great Barrier Reef getting together and putting on a Talk-a-Reef here in Mackay? When you invite

Grace Bros. Consultants, Day & Grimes Consultants and somebody else's consultants to come and sit down and talk with you, they can see for themselves something of the beauty of the Great Barrier Reef. I think it's got much to offer. It might be worthwhile to think about.

We need to find out just what there is here to sell. I would suggest there is a need for the industry to develop a Great Barrier Reef tourist information centre somewhere north of Brisbane to advise those people who are motoring north.

I read, some time ago, an excellent paper that was published in "Travel Week" in which John Pigram said that everywhere the demand for tourism is becoming more selective. Destinations and services which do not meet the needs of current demand, whose pricing is unrealistic or whose promotion is deficient, cannot expect to survive and that is what this workshop, I believe, is all about. Survival! Dr Pigram's statement underlies the fragile state of the tourist industry in Australia, a segment of the economy plagued more than any other by inflation, uncertainty and increasing consumer consciousness. We know that the people attending this workshop come from a variety of different areas associated with the travel industry. You may differ perhaps in the product you sell. The resort owner, hotelier, motelier, guest house proprietor, has accommodation on land to sell. The cruise operator has accommodation on water to sell, while airlines have seats on planes in the sky. The one thing we all have in common however, is a bed-night lost, a berth not slept in, or an airline seat not occupied. Tomorrow is another day. So when we examine the components that make up the industry, segment by segment, we all fit together somewhere in this overall pattern, and it is indeed, I believe, a cycle where each depends on the other. We, as travel agents, depend on you, the airline, the operator, the resort owner, because we can only live and we can only pay our rent and pay our staff according to the commissions we earn. We have a myriad of destinations to sell, overseas, within Australia, and finally, as I said, it's not until we come to that point of sale and take the money from the client that we have done you any good or done any good for ourselves.