



Industry Insight by... Advantage

Get the full makeover treatment says Colin O'Neill, business development director at Advantage Travel Partnership

LOOKING BACK over the last few weeks, I have realised that there are two areas of business opportunity that we had, up to now, failed to either appreciate or exploit but could have a real positive impact on our member partner businesses. Each area, although very different in their composition, are actually linked by the curious heading of my piece - a full makeover. The first area relates to the overall physical proposition offered by those agents who have a High Street presence - the shop itself.

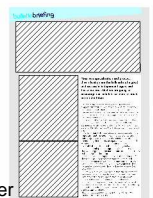
As an organisation, we offer a wide and comprehensive range of marketing support in the areas of monthly provision of point of sale materials, website development and direct marketing activity - all of which are creatively broken down into areas of specialisation including mainstream, cruise and luxury.

In addition, through our consultancy service proposition, we are also addressing soft business skills including selling, customer service and product knowledge skills training. But up to now we have stopped short of offering support and guidance in the area of shop layout and design. In hindsight, this can be potentially seen as a real gap in our service range

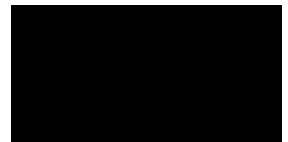
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We are shortly to partner with a retail expert who, through the use of Computer Aided Design (CAD) technology, will be able to create an exact and lifelike representation of any member shop and to visually make any modifications including racking, flooring and furniture prior to any refurbishment working taking place. This development will not only allow each member partner to visualise their new outlets but also save considerable time and money when it comes to the actual shop re-build.



Source: Travel Bulletin {Main}
Edition:
Country: UK
Date: Friday 24, October 2014
Page: 12
Area: 471 sq. cm
Circulation: ABC 6963 Weekly
Ad data: page rate £1,980.00, scc rate £0.00
Phone: 020 7834 6661
Keyword: The Montcalm



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Such is the sophistication of the technology employed that it truly different to distinguish from what is real and what is a visual representation. The second reference to makeover relates more to a product area and the growing popularity in spa and wellness holidays.

I recently attended a breakfast presentation that was solely devoted to these markets and I was staggered by the value of the market - an area that we and our member partners are largely missing out on.

As with many of these areas of specialisation, it is important that the agent really understands the market, product and customer benefits before announcing themselves as spa and wellness experts. However, business specialisation and product diversification are the hallmarks of a good and successful independent agent and these are areas that we are going to encourage our member partners to break into in the future.

Indeed, I was so impressed with the potential of these markets that we have added a dedicated session on spa and wellness to our annual Luxury Connoisseur Conference which takes place at The Montcalm March Arch Hotel in London on the 7th November.

Finally, whilst you may argue that the connection between the two subjects is slightly tenuous, they both make the overall point that in business you consistently need to review your products and proposition - to present your business in the most professional and attractive manner possible, offering current and potential new customers with different and exciting products.

After all, we all need to change and refresh our image from time to time.