

LMC Travel Marketing Program Advisory Board meeting notes May 9, 2013

The Advisory Board conference call was held on Thursday, May 9, 2013, from 1pm-2pm PDT. The following members participated in the call:

Donna Biggs, Anna Fesmire, Pat Gagnon, Kim Sherrett, Betsy Sullivan, Chris McGill, and Debbie Wilson. Nancy Vinson and Michelle Lindsey were unable to attend and will be contacted individually for their input.

Greetings and short intros (15-20 minutes): Your perspective of the travel industry – where you're coming from, what you see as trends and how they may impact new entrants to the industry.

Donna introduced herself and noted that she had been selling travel part-time for the last 10 years, and starting this year, she will be working full time in travel. She has attended the OSSN Home-Based travel show for the past three years. She has seen notable changes in two areas – 1) social media – would like to see more of that in the program; and 2) increased focus on custom independent tours that are structured – with a lot of growth in Europe.

Anna noted that she is more removed from the travel industry; although she was once strongly connected to it, she is now doing more corporate training for people not in the travel industry. She expressed concern with the rush to leap into social media; it provides a truncated form of communication. Anna posed the concern that we may start to lose the ability to articulate what we do. The ability to communicate the unique things that travel consultants do allows them to make a living (by charging their clients). If you are going to persuade people to pay you, you must articulate what makes you special. If you begin to speak in abbreviated terms only, you may risk losing your voice.

Pat has been with the Travel Institute since 1989 and has seen a lot of changes. She agreed that social media is key – being on the cloud, if you will. People who go into travel need to be agile/ flexible. Everyone is on the cloud, which is part of knowing about social media. It's not everything, but it's important in the current climate. Keeping the balance is important. Pat mentioned that she is pleased with how many people are looking to get into the industry. Many people are joining the Travel Institute webinars who are new to the industry.

Kim, who is new to the Advisory Board this year, has been a home-based agent and worked with HB agents for 17 years. Kim said that social media is big as a marketing tool – but perhaps not so much as a relationship builder. Kim is seeing a trend for a younger element joining the industry and has observed that the caliber of travel agent is getting better. People are taking the industry seriously.

Betsy, who has been in cruise sales for 30 years, said that social media is the new rage. From a sales standpoint, social media is important – you have to be Internet savvy. Technology is big. Social media is used in direct marketing, and can contribute as a relationship builder as well. Betsy cited Lu Maggiora (Vacation Discounters) as a good example of a travel counselor who uses social media effectively to keep her business at the forefront of people’s thoughts. Betsy also echoed Kim, saying that she is seeing a younger crowd coming into the industry.

Chris acknowledged that the travel program needs to add more information on social media and how to use it, but we need to explain that it is a tool and not the end-all, be-all.

Debbie noted that she had also noticed the increased professionalism of the home-based segment. She agreed with the emphasis being placed on social media and other technologies to reach prospective and current clients – but also agreed that there needs to be a balanced approach – one in which personal relationships are not ignored.

Feedback on Program Competencies (5 minutes): Feedback? Any gaps?

Summary of three PSLOs (competencies) for the Certificate of Achievement in Travel Marketing

By completing the requirements for the Certificate of Achievement in Travel Marketing, the student will be academically prepared to obtain an entry level position in the travel industry by:

- 1. Applying critical thinking to research, evaluate, analyze, and synthesize travel-related information.*
- 2. Demonstrating excellent communication skills as well as soft skills in a sales and business environment.*
- 3. Demonstrating knowledge of current technologies and applying technological skills necessary to succeed in the travel industry.*

Anna thought that these three cover it and can’t think of anything that’s missing. She emphasized the belief that travel professionals must distinguish themselves in the industry and that social media is one way to distinguish oneself. Clients must see the uniqueness of what you offer.

Pat added that developing personal relationships is a huge part of being unique.

Donna observed that the LMC students/ grads that met in Las Vegas all have unique niche markets, and because of their unique focuses, they didn’t feel in competition with one another.

***Mentoring Program (10 minutes):* Input, experience with mentoring, possibilities for shadowing, or other help (advising). Ask Donna to give a summary of the mentoring pilot from her perspective as a mentor.**

Donna said that it was a pleasure to be a part of the pilot. She and Jenny got to experiment with different things. A good blend of personalities is important to the success. Donna reported that Jenny (mentee) is doing phenomenally; she is very busy. Jenny had a lack of confidence in the beginning and hesitated to jump in with two feet. Someone supporting is helpful – another perspective. Donna said has been very rewarding to see Jenny's success.

Kim talked about her experiences as a mentor and also about the mentoring program at Nexion. As Director of Business Development, Kim developed Nexion's mentoring program and has been pleased with it. Nexion recently introduced the "Buddy System" – another aspect of the program – for people who don't need a mentor, but just need a sounding board. Kim observed that everybody can learn something from somebody – everybody has skill sets; in a mentoring relationship, everyone works together. Nexion is just now transitioning mentees into mentors. They are seeing increased sales as a result of the greater confidence level. The program was launched in October 2012; currently, there are 19 mentors and double mentees. The teams work together a minimum of 3 months at least one hour per month, but the teams usually opt for more frequent contact.

Pat offered that CTC's would probably want to be asked to be a mentor.

Anna added that one positive thing about mentoring is that when you've done something for a long time, you forget what it was like in the beginning. Working with someone as a mentee allows you to look at your profession with fresh eyes, and that can bring some insight.

Donna agreed with Anna, and said, "I probably got more out of it than Jenny did."

Technology for the Travel Industry (10 minutes) – What are the most important trends in technology, as related to travel industry? What do our students need to know, to practice? What do they need to be aware of?

Betsy – It is important to stress how to formulate their business model and which tools to utilize for managing their businesses – client lists, for example.

Pat – When it comes to social media, a lot of people need to think who are my customers? How do they want to be reached?

Donna added to Pat's remark -- They actually said that in Las Vegas; you need to pick two and do them well, according to your target audience. Donna said she was surprised in the number of CRM packages to manage clients. Access to a CRM is a valuable benefit a host company can provide.

Kim agreed that a CRM is necessary to market to clients. You still have to maintain that relationship. You need a reliable database in order to maintain those relationships. Familiarizing agents with agent portals (and what they provide) is important.

Do you have any questions about the program?

Pat – What about helping students find jobs?

Debbie – Many of our students choose the home-based route. There are fewer traditional brick and mortar agencies, and our students are scattered geographically, so things have changed drastically in the last several years. It's a challenge to keep track of where our students are and what they are doing, but we have a database and will be contacting them this summer.

Our major objectives:

- ***Completions***
- ***Success***
- ***Increased interaction and networking within the industry***
- ***Development of Mentoring program***

Thank you for participating as a member of our Advisory Board!