

LMC Travel Marketing Program Advisory Board Meeting Minutes

May 10, 2012, 1:00PM PDT

Members present:

Donna Biggs
Anna Fesmire
Pat Gagnon
Michelle Lindsey
Betsy Sullivan
Debbie Wilson

Absent: Nancy Vinson (sent comments via email) and Chris McGill

Greetings and Introductions

Meeting was opened and welcome extended by Debbie Wilson. Donna Biggs, new member and travel student, introduced herself.

Initial Comments

Travel Agents Making a Comeback

Anna referred to a recent article, "Are Travel Agents Back?" which was published April 20, 2012, in the *New York Times* Travel section. This was a very encouraging article about travelers returning to travel agents to arrange their travel. Anna was a presenter at the MAST conference in Baltimore last month, and during that conference, she mentioned that Mark Murphy referenced the article and made the statement, "Travel agents save you money." Anna noted that this is the wrong approach to take because it suggests that travel agents deliver the cheapest price. Although this may not have been the intent, a better approach would be that "travel agents save you time" or that "travel agents keep you from making stupid (or expensive) mistakes."

Anna suggested that as travel professionals, we should let Mark Murphy know that this message of "saving money" as the primary benefit of using a travel agent may not be the best approach. The point to make is that travelers really need a travel "counselor" to make sense of the information overload (as suggested in the article).

Donna noted that Mark Murphy will be at the Home-based Travel conference in Las Vegas next week, and perhaps those who will be there could give him this feedback in person!

Michelle said that she will also be in Las Vegas and suggested a meeting while there. Debbie will contact Michelle off line to arrange a meeting.

Pat wrapped up the discussion of the value of travel counselors by saying that there had been a lot of good press lately in the mainstream media – not just industry publications.

Attracting Younger People to the Travel Industry

The travel professionals highlighted in the *NY Times* article were younger travel professionals (under 40). Debbie posed the question, “How do we attract younger people to the profession?” Betsy noted that she is running across some younger travel professionals as she travels for her job, which is encouraging.

Any comments or ideas about attracting younger people to the profession are always welcome!

Update on Travel Marketing Program and Planning Activities

Vision 20/20 and Program Review – Future plans

Thank you to all who responded to surveys and personally attended workshops for the Vision 20/20 project! Input will be helpful when writing the strategic Program Review in the fall. We will be looking for Advisory Board input and comments as we draft that plan.

Plans are to consolidate the 6 short home-based courses into two courses: a one-unit introductory course and a two-unit more advanced course. It is more effective to present longer courses online rather than 3-week courses.

Improved Completion and Success

Improved completion rates will continue to be emphasized. One way we are planning to help increase completion rates is to publish a video presentation to provide information about the program, the curriculum, professional associations, and other benefits of joining the LMC Travel Marketing program. This video is currently a Voice Thread presentation, but plans are to revise it, upload it to YouTube, caption it, and have it ready by fall 2012. We will send out the link when it is completed.

A Voice Thread video presentation has also been developed to provide information on how to be successful in online courses. Plans are to revise this presentation, upload to YouTube and caption for posting in online classes in fall 2012.

Contact with professional travel community

Thank you to guest participants in TRAVL 95; guest participants this semester included Pat (her first time), Lu Maggiora (Vacation Discounters), and Betsy (for the group travel chapter). It was noted that everyone on the Advisory Board has now participated in TRAVL 95 at least once. This is a great opportunity for students to

connect with experienced travel professionals from a variety of areas, and it's also a great way for guests to experience LMC's online travel classes!

At least two LMC Travel grads will be applying to Tourism Cares for Professional Development scholarships this spring.

Debbie and about 12 LMC students/ grads will be attending the Home-based travel conference in Las Vegas next week.

Maintaining contact with travel grads

"Home grown" database is still not particularly elegant, but it is growing, and it works. The "Los Medanos Travel Students, Alumni, and Friends," Facebook page now has 111 members. The biggest challenge is to consistently update it with news and photos. We will send everyone the link.

Employment Opportunities

Travel employment is a constant challenge; currently we are doing it through our "home grown" database of students and grads. We are looking for job shadowing opportunities to provide a "real world" look at what jobs are like.

Promoting the Travel Marketing Program

Quality, not quantity, of contacts should be emphasized. Classes fill each semester, but we are always looking for those serious students who want to complete their certificates.

More and more students are finding the program through general Internet searches, which may take them to The Travel Institute or the ASTA website, and then they find the link to the LMC program. Donna shared that she found the program through The Travel Institute website link.

Pat suggested that possibly we could take advantage of the current positive press about the "return" to travel agents and write a press release to get more visibility.

Closing remarks

Emphasis will continue to be placed on completions, employment opportunities and placement, and an effort to attract younger people to the profession.

Michelle described a fairly new position for American Express Travel – the TRA, Travel Research Apprentice. This is a yearlong training position that is designed to culminate in a full-blown travel counselor position. American Express currently has openings for TRAs in Pasadena and Beverly Hills.

Again, many thanks for each member's participation and contribution!