

Are Travel Agents Obsolete?

It seems you cannot watch television for more than an hour without seeing an advertisement with William Shatner talking about Travelocity or that silly gnome talking about Orbitz. These travel web sites have been very successful at facilitating travelers to book their own airline and hotel reservations online. So with this huge push from the internet to take over the travel industry, one has to ask, "Are travel agents obsolete?"

If you have browsed some of these travel sites, you have observed that they are amazing in the diversity of travel options that they make available. And it is impossible to deny that many thousands of people have taken advantage of these services. As a business traveler, however, your needs are somewhat different than the typical airline passenger.

There are some very specific services that a living and breathing travel agent can provide that simply cannot be replicated by an automated web site like Travelocity or Orbitz. Some of those services that a seasoned business traveler would be hard pressed to live without include...

§ Focus. You as a business traveler are not arranging this trip for entertainment. You have specific business objectives in mind. So if you must take time away from preparation for your business task to worry about travel itineraries, hotel and rental car reservations and the like, that is time that you are not being productive for your business. If you can call a talented travel agent who knows your travel profile well and delegate those arrangements to that agent, they do their job in finding just the right accommodations for you and you are freed to do what you do best, focus on your business and the upcoming business trip.

§ Economy. It is difficult to find that balance between finding the accommodations that fit the demanding schedule of a businessperson on the road and is respectful of the companies travel budget as well. If you use an automated online travel service, you may have to sacrifice convenience, schedule or location for economy. A good travel agent will work hard to get you the right itinerary while getting as close the corporate travel cost restrictions as possible. And they will do it without taking up a lot of your time.

§ Back up. You don't need help if your trip goes completely as planned. But if you encounter problems on the road, you can find yourself in need or rescheduling flights and finding new accommodations to work around canceled flights, weather issues or other unexpected interruptions to your plans. These travel disasters are not mindful of your tight deadlines to meet your business

goals. But if you have a travel agent who is dedicated to providing you service, he or she can find those alternative routes and resources to do all they can to get you to your destination so you can conduct your business on time.

§ That personal touch. You may have travel preferences that you want to achieve with each trip you take. A travel agent has your profile and your travel history so they can do what they can to accommodate your preferences. But moreover, if you have specific special needs such as a diet limitation or a need for accommodation due to a disability, it will be a travel agent that sees to it that your needs are provided for and you are well taken care of on the road.

§ Complications. If your travel itinerary involves making connections with other business partners who are traveling from diverse offices, complex travel schedules and itinerary challenges that just cannot be described to the generic screens of an online travel service, you can explain these complications to your travel agent and they can work with other travel agents working to organize the meeting and see to it that your itinerary meets your requirements.

While the online travel services do provide a valuable and affordable alternative to the general traveling public, it is easy to notice their limitations if you are trying to book a trip that is tricky or if you have specific needs that the screens do not anticipate. That is why working with a human travel agent guarantees that this travel professional will dedicate themselves to the task of making sure your trip works to your specifications and that you get to your destination ready to conduct business and be successful in your achieving your goals.