

Interview with Joanie Ogg, past president of NACTA

Harvey, your agency has been hosting travel professionals since 1981. That would undoubtedly make you one of the trendsetters in the field and certainly your company's longevity and strength is to be commended.

You and I have been friends and colleagues for many years now and we have both watched the home-based channel change and morph into one of the industry's leading sales channels of distribution. Could you share with our readers some chunks of wisdom about what they should or should not be looking for when they choose a hosting partner?

When choosing a Host Agency, look for one that:

- Is large enough to give you the benefits of strong industry ties and support, but not so large that you get lost in numbers.
- Will not attempt to steal your clients
- Is financially stable
- Has been in business a long time and pays commissions on time, every time
- Ask if you are allowed to work directly with supplier BDMs. Are you isolated and/or limited to the questions you can ask a supplier?
- Is there coop money you can tap to help you with your marketing programs?
- Are you continually made aware of industry happenings, promotions and events, or are you on your own to get this information?
- And, most importantly, cares about you and your success

In these less than optimal times, agents need strong support. Through our close supplier relationships, Orbitz, Travelocity and Expedia are no longer impediments to closing the deal. Our agents can offer the same prices with a smile, and the personal service the Internet agencies do not.

Many of your independent agents have been part of Incentive Connection Travel since your early beginnings. That is always a strong testament to a model that works. What is the secret?

Since we have no retail trade nor do we charge a fee, our business model is 100% based on agent support with the philosophy that if the agent does not succeed, neither do we.

Being part of a mega franchise company might sound intriguing, but they are highly regulated and limits what you can and cannot do within your own business. You are an Independent Contractor, and as such, are governed by the IRS rules for ICs. You are entitled to run your business in any way you choose (within the guidelines of the industry and good business practices), build your business to the max and should you decide to leave, your clients go with you..not stay as a house account of your former Host Agency.

Incentive Connection Travel is affiliated with the Ensemble Consortium. What benefits does that offer agents that are affiliated with Incentive Connection Travel?

Ensemble is one of the worlds most respected consortia. It is member agency owned and can

therefore offer greater discounts, programs, higher commissions and benefits because all profit is given back to its member owned agencies in the form of these higher commissions and programs that we fully pass on to our agents.

Some of the Ensemble Programs we offer at **no cost to all our agents**, are the **Ensemble Cruise Amenity Program** where you can offer group rates on a one cabin sale, convenience of a Host on board, complimentary private cocktail party, bottle of wine, free Shore Excursion(s), robe or other pillow gifts..all in your name as your clients agent and at no cost to you, Agent Port, Trams ClientBase Plus and the best Host Agency Support in the industry.

Ensemble has an outstanding Marketing Program offering mailings of full color magazines, flyers, postcards and emails throughout the year to your client base with your name, address and logo. Through a proprietary computer program, it will filter out the demographics so that these mailings will go to the appropriate client. For example, a Silverseas client will not get an NCL mailing.

Does Incentive Connection Travel offer agent ticketing?

We offer Sabre 24 X 7 ticketing. Of interest is that the Host Agency owned by Sabre charges \$39 per month to use Sabre..we offer full access for \$25, including Sabre Tours, Sabre Cruise and Bargain Finder Plus and with no ticketing charge.

Does an agent really need to do ticketing? After all, there is no commission paid.

Ticketing is optional, but if a client asks you for a \$49 Southwest ticket, and you say, Sorry, I cannot help you. You will have to get this ticket from the agency down the street.. who do you think will also get that world cruise this client will be booking next month? You, or the full service agency you turned him to?

Commission on air: It is well known that our partners in the sky have stopped paying commission many years ago. But not so well known is that large agencies, like Incentive Connection Travel have private contracts on regularly scheduled air that pays as much as 20% as well as added bonuses. We have well over a dozen such private contracts

Does Incentive Connection Travel offer any Booking Engines?

We offer access to every suppliers booking engine including Polar One Source, Cruising Power, VAX, Apple OnLine, Sabre Tours and Sabre Cruises....all at no cost to our agents. And the client booking site, AgentPort can be incorporated free into any web site with unlimited free use.

What are Incentive Connections fees and commission levels?

Since our inception in 1981, we charge **NO** activation fee, and our monthly fees have always been **ZERO**. Our commission splits range from 70-80%. We earn top-tier, front-end, back-end and bonus commissions with all major suppliers and many minor, regional suppliers as well. We pass on the total commission amount and bonuses to our agents at their split level. Agent earned

booking perks and free trips belong to the agent.

How does Incentive Connection Travel help agents who work from home feel part of a larger community?

ICT is very proud to have a family of agents. Many of our agents have become close friends with the Siamon family even attending weddings and birthdays. Being a family operation, father, mother, son and 2 daughters and of course a very professional support staff, we have a unique opportunity to care about our agents and the feeling runs throughout the ICT community fostering friends helping friends. Unlike other companies that try to isolate each agent, we encourage agents to communicate through our very active Chat Email, Annual Convention, many Seminars at Sea and getting together at industry events like Cruise360, CLIA and local chapter meetings of OSSN and NACTA. Many of our agents are chapter directors. We all network in a variety of ways, including joining public and private online groups, asking questions and making recommendations. Through this community networking, our members increase their knowledge base by sharing their expertise with others in the community. We do not have a staff of 50, so when help is needed, we know you and you know us

What is PATH and how does it help agents in choosing a host agency?

Incentive Connection Travel is a proud founding member of PATH (Professional Association of Travel Hosts) which is an organization that has long been needed to police Host Agencies. We have strict guidelines, practices and policies that must be met and maintained before a Host Agency is allowed to become a member. Any agency that does not continue to meet these guidelines will not be allowed to remain in the organization. It assures Independent Agents that strict criteria are being adhered to.

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