

The new age

Travel and technology go hand in hand — Jennifer Thomas looks at the top 10 emerging technologies

1 E-MAIL MARKETING
Successful e-mail campaigns rely on a successful delivery. Firstly, you need to obtain permission and provide a 'welcome message' describing the content clients will be receiving. To get added to personal 'approved lists', provide an opt-in or opt-out option. Then consider your content. Ensure your brand is prominent in the 'from' and/or 'subject' lines and accurately reflects the content being distributed.

To assure delivery, follow established protocols to ensure messages are passed through mailbox providers. Scrub your lists by removing bounce backs and making changes. Monitoring e-mail delivery, and open and click-through rates, is essential. The Direct Marketing Association has created best practices agents can look at. www.the-dma.org

2 SEARCH ENGINE SUCCESS
Have you ever wondered when you go to Google and type in 'luxury travel' how certain companies appear on the top of the list? It's not by accident. Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is a vital part of online marketing — search engines shop for the right mix of words and phrases and then display them. Phrases such as 'Hawaii destination weddings' are better used than general words such as 'weddings' as you have a better chance of being at the top of a search, targeting more qualified customers.

In ASTA's *Search Engine Optimization Guide*, by David Callan, a title tag is the key area of your website page as far as search engines are concerned. 'All search engines give relevancy to words found in the title tag,' writes Callan, webmaster of AKA Marketing.com.

3 BLOG BOOST
A blog is a powerful, far-reaching marketing tool — consider it as instant publishing power to reach new customers and build customer loyalty. Cheryl Contee, assistant vice-president of Issue Dynamics (www.idi.net), says: "People want to be told a story and telling travel stories has been around since time began. Think of Marco Polo. Blogging gives us a mechanism to update our stories and tell new ones."

According to the Pew Internet & American Life Project, 57 million Americans have visited a blog and 12 million have created a blog. Michael MacNair, president & CEO of MacNair Travel Management (www.macnairtravel.com), has even included creating a blog into his 2006 marketing plan. He says: "I have intellectual capital to offer the marketplace about how and why to develop a strategic travel management plan over just buying tickets." To start, try free services such as Blogger (www.blogger.com), Wordpress (www.wordpress.com) and MSN Spaces (www.spaces.msn.com).

4 PODCAST PROMOS
Podcasting, video and audio, is growing in popularity as a way to reach customers 'on their terms', according to IDI's Contee. "If a travel agent has a promotional video, they can create a smaller segment, digitise it, create an RSS (real simple syndication) and have a podcast," she says. In fact, Pew Internet & American Life Project says more than 22 million American adults own iPods or MP3 players and 29%, more than six million, have downloaded podcasts from the web.

5 LEVERAGING LINKS
Sharing value-added resources with clients has multiple benefits, building customer loyalty and dovetailing with partners' expanding reach. The types of partners to link with include books, weather, maps, currency, cellphones, internet, travel advisories, passports and customs.

6 BACK TO BASICS
Increasing productivity and reducing expenses are two business goals to improve internal processes, so do not overlook back office items impacting on profitability. Michael MacNair, president & CEO of MacNair's, says: "We use the fare search enhancement tool Booking Builder, which allows us to offer and confirm unique fare savings opportunities for our customers not found in our GDS. It gives us a competitive advantage, allowing us to change what we need to charge for this unique value."

Lynda Maxwell, CTC, of Destinations, an ASTA director, says: "I do my own book-keeping and with TRAMS I have all my information in one place and accessible to me all of the time. I don't have to input all the information myself. When any of us invoice a client it automatically goes into accounting. All client information is stored for future reference and for marketing purposes."



In an age where technology lets an agency capture personal information about a client, this equates to power and value

7 ONLINE DRIVE
Being open 24/7 has become a necessity as consumers look to book vacation packages, hotels and airline tickets online or via an agency website. The Travel Industry Association of America (TIA) Travelers' Use of the Internet 2005 survey found more than 80% of travelers who plan vacations online make reservations online.

This figure represents more than 64 million Americans who bought or reserved an airline ticket, hotel room, rental car or package tour online this past year — up from 70% the previous year. However, ASTA's Technology & Marketing Report (February 2006) states: "On average, agencies attribute just 7.1% of total sales to website leads."

8 SUPPLY AND DEMAND
The ability to research availability and book vacation packages for clients via suppliers' websites is advantageous in terms of saving 'on hold' time, accessing information after a supplier's reservation department has closed and reviewing real-time inventory.

ASTA's Technology & Marketing Report states nearly 83% of member agencies have booked on a supplier's website without using their GDS or calling the supplier. Tropical Latitudes Travel president Bill Thomas says online booking engines such as Travel Impressions (www.travelimpressions.com) give instant access. He says: "At any time I can research a vacation to virtually anywhere."

9 CUSTOMER CARE
In an age where technology lets an agency capture personal information, this equates to power and value. Using a Customer Relations Management (CRM) technology platform, an agency can evaluate marketing outreach efforts closely. CRM can capture all of a traveler's history, destination wish list, contact preferences, personal information, preferred payment information, hobbies, activities and more. CRM is about building relationships, a necessity to be successful in the travel industry.

Technology providers such as TRAMS' ClientBase are making enhancements to their CRM systems to allow e-mail marketing to be integrated. Shelley Wilson, CTC, vice-president, CWT/Alexander Travel, says: "We use ClientBase to manage our database and accrue information about our clients' travel plans as well as costs — the more up-to-date we are with technology, the more efficient our agents can be in processing their work."

10 WIKITRAVEL
Wiki what? Wikipedia.com states 'a wiki' (wee-kee or wick-ey) is a type of website allowing users to add, remove or otherwise edit all content quickly and easily, sometimes without the need for registration. Wiki is a shorter form of wiki wiki (weekie weekie), the native language of Hawaii, where it is commonly used as an adjective to denote something 'quick' or 'fast'.

Wikipedia (www.wikipedia.com), is a free online encyclopedia formed by collaborative contributions of readers with a million-plus articles. It allows travel agencies to post and edit content. Wikitravel (www.wikitravel.com) is another opportunity for the travel industry to educate clients and showcase its expertise as this portal creates free worldwide travel guides. There are more than 9,000 destination guides and articles written by 'Wikitravellers' — the forum fosters collaboration.

IMAGE GETTY IMAGES/CONICA