

ASTA, HYATT SPONSOR PROGRAM

Agencies honored for best business practices

By MICHAEL MILLIGAN

WASHINGTON – Once upon a time, just about all an agent had to do to find the lowest air fare for a client was log onto a GDS. But those days are long gone.

Today, finding the lowest fare “involves looking at published fares, looking at Web fares, looking at tour operator fares and consolidator fares,” said Michael MacNair, president and CEO of MacNair Travel Management American Express in Alexandria, Virginia.

In fact, finding the lowest fare is so much more complicated these days that some frustrated agents have given up selling certain types of air tickets all together.

Not MacNair. If anything, he contends the more complicated fares become, the more consumers need travel agents.

MacNair says the more complicated fares become, the more consumers need agents.

“What do people pay consultants for? It is to simplify complexities,” he said.

And that’s exactly what MacNair and his staff set out to do two years ago. The result is Global Fare Search, a broad ranging solution that scans multiple sources - including Web fares, published fares and certain negotiated rates unique to MacNair Travel Management – to find the lowest price.

Not only did the effort help the business, it made MacNair Travel Management one of four travel agencies honored by ASTA and Hyatt Hotels in a project designed to identify the best of the best in agency business practices.

Four winners

MacNair Travel Management won for its fare search and innovative use of technology.

The other winners were Bayside Travel in Larchmont, N.Y., which won for marketing and Associated Wayfarer Travels in Lafayette, LA, and Travel Solutions of Westerville, Ohio, both of which were honored in the human resources / operations category.

The program, jointly sponsored by ASTA and Hyatt Hotels, is called the Best Travel Agent Practices Study: Opportunities for Profit.



Michael MacNair of MacNair Travel Management accepts his firm's award. MacNair won the award for Global Fare Search, a solution that scans multiple sources to find the lowest price.

The project involved collecting case studies from agencies around the country that had developed plans to improve and adapt their businesses.

The case studies were collected and then reviewed by a panel of experts that included other travel agents. Out of that review, the four winners were selected.

“The study is an important piece of what we do for travel agents,” said Kathy Sudeikis, ASTA Vice

President, during a presentation in Washington honoring the winners.

“We are putting each of [the case studies] onto ASTAnet’s members-only site along with [information] about the companies so that [members] can figure out what works for [them],” Sudeikis said.

“We are trying to give [ASTA Members] some opportunities, resources and tools to improve their businesses.”

‘Work on it, not in it’

MacNair said he valued the opportunity to share his experiences with other travel agents and to persuade them to remain positive about their role in the sale of travel in the face of a changing industry.

“I want to encourage people to work on their businesses more and less in their business,” MacNair said.

“Many times, we get to the point in crisis management where we are overwhelmed. We forget to spend time creating these types of best practices that could help us transform our businesses. Commit time every week to work on your business.”

MacNair said he figures his technology project, which included installing high-speed Internet access at all agent workstations, cost about \$75,000. But the investment has really paid off, he said.

MacNair said the Global Fare Search process, now called Go-AwayDeals, has enabled his agents to provide better customer service, which in turn has helped garner new business while retaining the current client base.

Travel agencies “have to transform,” MacNair said. “Business is always changing, and we need to stay one step ahead of it.”