

TravelManagers targets 500 members as home agency growth accelerates



Growing steadily ... PTMs and Travel Managers staff at the company's annual conference

By Jenny Burns

TRAVELMANAGERS is looking to increase the number of home based agents (or personal travel managers as the company calls them) working under its banner to around 500 in the near future.

Speaking at the group's annual conference in Melbourne last month, chairman Barry Mayo said the organisation was looking for experienced travel consultants with a minimum of three years' experience. Currently TravelManagers 325 personal travel managers (PTMs) have an average of over 16 years' experience.

Mayo said the company was ideal for agents who wanted to change their business model and shed the burdens of having to worry about maintaining a shopfront business, employing staff and the other responsibilities of running a High Street travel agency.

"We have seen fairly constant growth in numbers over the years since we started," he said.

There were 150 of TravelManagers' PTMs in attendance at the two-day annual conference in Melbourne with the theme "creating value".

Through supplier presentations and expert guest speakers they were updated on latest product offerings from major suppliers and advised on

business topics including database development, effective communication, technology and marketing.

A key feature of the conference was

SME (small to medium enterprises) sector of the corporate as another growth area which its PTMs can service profitably.



John Gazal, centre, is congratulated on his national PTM of the year award by Joe Araullo (Travel Managers), left, and Hugh Chevront-Breton (Singapore Airlines).

a series of cruise workshops designed for experienced cruise sellers and those who are not cruise specialist but want to tap into this expanding market segment.

"We see cruising as an area of great growth for our PTMs and we are doing all we can to help them grow this part of their business," Mayo said.

The company has also identified the

Indicating growing recognition of the turnover now being generated by the home-based travel agent sector, Mayo reported demand from partner suppliers to participate in the business networking session booths outstripped the capacity.

"This shows suppliers the many benefits of working with TravelManagers," he said.

Opening the conference, TravelManagers executive general manager, Mandy Scotney, told the PTMs that the company has increased the value of the services it provides them, by putting increased resources into operations, marketing, accounts and business process management.

She also highlighted the introduction of emergency texts and enhancements to the company's marketing offering and website and exclusive product detailed in email newsletters.

"We implemented our own inhouse booking system helping you to be more competitive and make bigger margins," she told the gathering.

"And we are constantly looking for opportunities to streamline system and improve efficiencies."

Scotney said the outlook for 2012 and beyond was very rosy and the opportunities for the company massive.

"Mobile consulting is growing faster in Australia than any other segment of the market," she said.

"In the US there are over 50,000 mobile consultants while in the US and Canada mobile consultants make 50 per cent of the leisure bookings."

■ A social media strategy was a

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Top TravelManagers' PTMs with executive general manager Mandy Scotney, from left, Russell Masterton, Ric Pattaro, John Gazal, John Lengacher, Di Yates, Daniela Tatonetti and Rebecca Crosbie.

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central part of plans to grow the TravelManagers brand outlined to conference delegates by marketing manager Chrissy Tayfield.

She launched a new consumer video (<http://youtube/56NEoEDpY4U>) as part of her presentation.

"During the next year we will be enhancing the consumer experience on our website, reworking the personal travel manager profile template and re-engineering the destination guides and travel diary sections," Tayfield added.

"We will launch a corporate facebook page (due in the first quarter of 2012) and will be including a travel blog on the website.

"We will maintain our trade public relation activities to strengthen the brand within the industry and expand our range of personal travel manager templates to ensure consistency across all marketing activities."

Echoing comments on preferred product selling at the conferences of the major bricks and mortar chains, TravelManagers chief executive Joe Araullo told delegates that priorities for 2012 include "providing leadership" around the choice of suppliers.

Speaking at the close of the conference he said leadership would take into account a supplier's consultant



Celebrating a successful conference ... TravelManagers' NPO accounts team, from left, Sandra Reucker, Bora Yeon, Tanyu Cilek, Luke Hormis and Jasmine Jackson.

knowledge, the provision of education and training, assistance with itinerary planning, depth of destination experience and initiative in problem solving.

"The outcome of this leadership will be improved earning capacity for PTMs," he said.

"We also aim to improve PTMs productivity by uncomplicating travel through working more closely with our technology partners, integrating systems, creating efficiencies and giving access to better tools and systems than a customer will have access to.

"At the same time we will provide better support by looking to create our own dedicated support teams for Tramada, Amadeus and other parts of the business including the provision of support outside standard business hours.

"And finally we want to bring back the fun into travel by providing PTMs with access to more familiarisation seats, encouraging travel with family members, providing increased access to industry discounts and stimulating more internal social interaction."

Gazal, Tatonetti star at awards

JOHN Gazal, from Roseville, NSW, picked up an extraordinary five of nine personal travel manager awards up for grabs at the awards function that closed last month's TravelManagers conference.

His titles included the peak accolade of top personal travel manager (PTM) for 2011. He was also named NSW/ACT PTM of the year, best new PTM in NSW/ACT and nationally and received an additional "gong" as one of the top 10 PTMs. The night was an overwhelming experience for Gazal who signed up as a TravelManagers PTM just 22 months ago.

"The weekend conference was an awesome opportunity to share ideas and experiences with my peers," he said.

"I am very grateful for the personal accolade of top personal travel manager and thankful for the opportunities afforded me throughout my career."

Rivalling Gazal's performance was Daniela Tatonetti who arrived at the conference just days after being one of five finalists in the Avis Scholarship of Excellence.

She received three awards from TravelManagers. She was named in their top 10, as well as the most improved for Western Australia and nationally.

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■ SANTIAGO-based LAN Airlines has launched its fourth affiliate carrier, LAN Colombia, joining LAN Peru, LAN Argentina and LAN Ecuador. The move, which follows LAN's acquisition of Colombia-based airline Aires, adds 22 Colombia ports to LAN's network plus Bogotas-Fort Laudersale.

■ AIR Vanuatu is offering roundtrip \$199 fares (including all taxes and charges) for children two to 11 years of age accompanied by an adult from Brisbane, Sydney or Melbourne to Port Vila and from Brisbane to Espiritu Santo. The fare is available on bookings completed

by January 31 for departures between February 1 and March 29, 2012.

■ ITALY has joined Emirates' burgeoning A380 network with daily Dubai-Rome services adding 250 seats a day to the route – a 34 per cent increase.

■ NORFOLK Air and Norfolk Island Tourism have extended their "Self Famil" program until February 2012 offering agents and partner or friend airfares of \$99 plus taxes (\$200 plus taxes for partner/friend) in combination with over 15 accommodation options including free

nights and discounts along with a range of tour options.

■ TRAVEL Indochina has added 10 pages of Burma arrangements to its latest 44-page Handmade Holidays Thailand brochure. They detail accommodation and touring in Yangon, Mandalay, Bagan, Inle Lake, Ngapali Beach Mt Kyaiktiyo/"Golden Rock", plus two Irrawaddy river cruising options. New Thailand offerings include Ariyasom Villa and The Eugenia in Bangkok plus a range of boutique beach resorts in Trang, Koh Kradan, Koh Samet, Koh Phangan and Koh Tao.

