

“I always say a cheap vacation can still be a very expensive mistake.”

in the offline world,: Travel agency technology

By Mitra Sorrells |

Like any industry, travel has been profoundly changed by advancements in technology. How people research, book and experience a trip is completely different than it was just 20 years ago.

Travel is inherently about a physical experience.

Travel is about seeing, doing, tasting, touching, meeting.

It's about human interaction.

“As agents, we can't possibly have been everywhere, but when you put us together, we can say, ‘Who's been to this resort?’ and get real feedback from a travel agent point of view.”

Johnson has also seen an increase in the tools she can provide to her clients to digitize their experience.

Johnson says she does also work with the online travel agencies' affiliate programs, but she prefers not to book clients through those sites.

“When you go to a hotel and you book through a site like that, they know your loyalty is only to price, so they may give you the room by the laundry room. **If they need to walk someone, they will walk you.** They know you will only ever be looking for price, so they're not concerned about keeping your loyalty,” she says.

But in cases where one of these sites offers the best deal, Johnson says she encourages clients to let her handle the booking since there is no additional cost to them and it comes with something that is priceless – peace of mind from knowing Johnson has sales representatives at the OTAs that can assist her if something goes wrong for one of her clients.

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- Behind-the-scenes

Powering the search and booking engines of the dozens of suppliers that Johnson and other agents use are the global distribution systems.

And as consumer-facing sites have matured to provide deep access to travel products and prices, agents rely on **these agent-exclusive products combined with their industry expertise to help them differentiate their services.**

“We are highly acclaimed for having over 260 airlines that have branded fares and ancillaries in our Travelport Smartpoint, where this content can be consumed through our APIs,” says Erika Moore, vice president and general manager of U.S. sales for Travelport.

Sabre Travel Network's leisure segment marketing manager, , says it has three areas of focus for its agent-facing technology: automation of repetitive and tedious tasks, integration of IATA's New Distribution Capability content standards and facilitation of business intelligence and data analytics.

All of these capabilities are available to agents through the new Sabre Red Workspace, the company's point-of-sale tool for travel agencies that has been rolling out since April.