



PRESS RELEASE

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The future of selling travel is in the service, says Travel Counsellors

Leading independent travel company Travel Counsellors is supporting a recent travel report, which has highlighted the fact that UK customers are looking for personal expertise and knowledge when booking with a travel agent.

The Travel Agents Leisure Intelligence report from Mintel advises that travel agents should consider an approach similar to counselling with their customers, seeking to identify a client's "emotional needs" and matching these to the most suitable products.

"This is the very foundation of our business model, hence the name of our company," says Travel Counsellors Chairman and founder David Speakman, who launched Travel Counsellors 15 years ago in order to allow experienced agents the opportunity to run their own travel businesses from home, concentrating on giving their customers the highest levels of service.

"Customers want to book with an agent they can trust and in these uncertain times this is even more important. We take all the administration off our agents so that they can take the time to build relationships with their customers, getting to know them and tailor-making holidays to suit their needs. This service cannot be matched by travel agents on the high street, who are often too bogged down in paperwork and are being told what products to sell to their clients."

The report states that agents are too focused on product and destinations and are insufficiently concerned with customer needs, with high street agencies facing a lingering decline if they do not change. It reports that the most successful repeat-business models seem to be travel agencies that promote a higher proportion of well-travelled graduates and commission-based home workers, such as that of Travel Counsellors, which is the world's largest home-based travel company.

Travel Counsellors' booking figures reflect this trend, with the company's sales unaffected by the current climate. The company's focus on customer service is also reflected in the fact that it has achieved a world beating score in loyalty and satisfaction*, putting it alongside companies including Apple, ebay, Four Seasons, Harley Davidson and Cisco for top customer service.

The Mintel report warns against cutting jobs because of the recession and instead advocates investing more to develop quality staff. Travel Counsellors supports this, claiming its agents each having an average 20 years experience, which they can pass onto their customers.

Speakman adds; "High street agencies should not blame the current climate for poor sales, they should instead look closer to home, investing in their staff and focusing on customer service. I am delighted that this report highlights what we have said for the past 15 years – that the customer must always come first."

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Research taken from Mintel's Travel Agents Leisure Intelligence report (December 2008), which provides an overview of UK travel agents, investigating the core market factors, strengths and weaknesses, company developments/innovations, consumer dynamics and likely future trends.



*Travel Counsellors uses the Net Promoter® Score system to measure customer satisfaction. Two weeks after booking all customers are sent a simple question 'How likely is it that you would recommend your Travel Counsellor to your friends and colleagues?' Customers can give us a score ranging from 1 to 10. Since Travel Counsellors started measuring our customers' responses in 2007 it has consistently achieved a world beating score of over 90%, far higher than that achieved by other travel companies and putting it among just a handful of companies worldwide that are rated so highly by their customers.

About Travel Counsellors: Travel Counsellors is the world's largest home-based travel company with turnover at the end of its last financial year (Oct 31 2008) of £245 million, a 16% increase year on year. Founded in 1994 it currently has over 1,000 travel consultants who work from home with the support of over 240 staff at the company's UK headquarters in Bolton and overseas offices. The company operates in the UK, Ireland, the Netherlands, South Africa, Australia, Canada and the US. In the UK Travel Counsellors places all customer money in a Trust account which guarantees a 100% refund in the event that a supplier collapses. Travel Counsellors was the winner of the prestigious Queen's Award for Enterprise in 2003-2008, the technology category of the 2005 CBI Growing Business Awards and was voted Travel Agent of the Year by readers of the Guardian, Observer and Guardian Unlimited in 2006 & 2007.

For further information contact:

Victoria Fox or Helen Furnivall

Tel: 00 44 1204 536 191 / 002

E-mail: victoria.fox@travelcounsellors.com / helen.furnivall@travelcounsellors.com