

## **PRESS RELEASE**

**December 5 2005**

### **Travel Counsellors awarded ATOL by the Civil Aviation Authority**

Independent travel agency Travel Counsellors PLC is delighted to announce that it has been awarded its ATOL by the Civil Aviation Authority.

Travel Counsellors received its ATOL last Wednesday (November 30) and made the announcement to its consultants at its annual conference in Birmingham last weekend (Dec 2-4).

The ATOL forms an important part of Travel Counsellors' strategy of developing the best dynamic packaging system in the industry for its consultants. Travel Counsellors was the winner of the 'Technology in Business' category of the prestigious Growing Business Awards last week and prides itself on its IT capabilities.

Currently it has six full time developers working solely on its custom-built Phenix dynamic packaging system. Over the next two weeks a further 2,000 hotels in Europe, the USA and Canada will be added to it. The company is currently training all its consultants to use the system using interactive web training. So far around 300 of its 560 consultants have been through the training which allows an instructor based at its Bolton head office to guide a group of consultants on how to use the system remotely, answering any questions they may have as they arise.

Chairman David Speakman told consultants at the conference that the system meant there was no reason to be worried about commission cuts by the big four. He explained that there was a massive opportunity for them to increase their earnings by using it. Mr Speakman said: "You shouldn't be bothered – it had to happen what did you expect? It is no problem. For the first time you will be in control of what you can charge the customer. It will mean your earnings increase rather than are reduced."

Mr Speakman revealed that sales with Thomson had increased over the past year, as a proportion of its business the big four was becoming less important. In the past financial year (to October 31 2005) Thomson had accounted for just 5.6% of its sales, with the big four accounting for just 16.3% of total sales. In addition almost half of all business to the big four (47%) was flight only, rather than packages.

He told delegates: "Good agents are no longer the middle man. The tour operator is the middle man. You are the one that owns the customer and which have the relationship with the client. The majors are four years late in responding to market trends. They will close shops, we will continue to grow and you will earn more than ever before. You are the travel consultants that the high street can't afford."

#### **ENDS**

EDITOR'S NOTES: Travel Counsellors PLC is one of the UK's largest independent travel agencies with turnover at the end of its last financial year (Oct 31 2005) of £150 million, a 17% increase year on year. Founded by chairman David Speakman in 1994 it currently has over 560 travel consultants nationwide who work from home with the support of over 110 staff at the company's head office in Bolton, Greater Manchester. During 2005 it also expanded into Southern Ireland, where it now has 12 consultants and the Netherlands, where it has five consultants to date. Travel Counsellors prides itself on the exceptional levels of personal service it offers its clients, a fact that was recognised in 2003 when it received the prestigious Queen's Award for Enterprise. Travel Counsellors places all customer money in a Trust account, administered by the Barclays Bank Trust Company, which guarantees a 100% refund in the event that a supplier collapses.

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