

## **PRESS RELEASE**

**March 22 2005**

### **Leading travel firm backs Mintel findings on death of 'conventional' travel agencies**

Independent travel agency Travel Counsellors PLC says its sales figures reinforce research due to be released tomorrow (March 23) by Mintel which says that customers are turning away from traditional travel agencies in favour of new ways of booking holidays.

The Queen's Award winning firm – whose agents all work from home - expects to recruit its 500<sup>th</sup> agent in just a few weeks time and currently has 490 consultants located across the country. It has also put in place aggressive expansion plans which will see the company taking its concept into Southern Ireland and Europe later in the year, as well as taking on more agents in the UK.

Mintel's 2005 British Lifestyles Report, released tomorrow, states that the number of holidays abroad booked through a travel agent has remained static since 1999. But clearly this refers to traditional agencies – and not new ways of booking holidays such as through home-based travel experts. In fact Travel Counsellors' ten ever busiest days have all taken place since the beginning of 2005. Its Personal Travel Counsellors – the core of its business – have already booked almost 50,000 passengers so far this financial year \* - 30% more than during the same period a year earlier. Since the start of the financial year its Personal Travel Counsellors have booked holidays worth almost £41million\*\* – a 36% increase year on year. The company expects its turnover will exceed £160million by the financial year end.

Travel Counsellors PLC managing director Steve Byrne says: "We agree with Mintel's research that there has been a marked shift away from booking holidays via traditional travel agencies. But that does not mean there is not a place for agencies altogether. Our experience is that customers appreciate the benefit of someone they can trust who offers them excellent customer service and value for money. This is particularly the case for tailor made itineraries which are very difficult to customers to organise independently on the web."

Travel Counsellors' customers benefit from the fact that the company is completely independent – with no one supplier accounting for more than eight per cent of its business. This is in contrast to most big high street agencies which will try to directionally sell the customer a holiday. Its agents also have access to leading-edge technology which benefits their customers – for example they can search all airfare options including scheduled, consolidated and no frills - for the customer in a matter of minutes.

On average the company's agents have an average 18 years experience. Many were previously managers or deputy managers of high street travel agencies. To join Travel Counsellors, agents must have at least four years ABTA agency experience in the past five.

To find your nearest Personal Travel Counsellor enter your postcode at [www.travelcounsellors.com](http://www.travelcounsellors.com) or call 0800 093 1388.

## **ENDS**

### **EDITOR'S NOTES:**

\*Travel Counsellors' Personal Travel Counsellors booked 48,958 passengers during the period Nov 1 2004 – March 21 2005, compared to 37,729 during the same period a year earlier

\*\*Travel Counsellors' Personal Travel Counsellors booked holidays worth £40,710,428 during the period Nov 1 2004 – March 21 2005, compared to bookings worth £30,037,647 during the same period 12 months earlier

Travel Counsellors PLC is one of the UK's largest independent travel agencies with turnover at the end of its last financial year (Oct 312004) of £128 million, a 32% increase year on year. Founded by chairman David Speakman in 1994 it currently has over 490 travel agents nationwide who work from home with the support of nearly 100 staff at the company's head office in Bolton, Greater Manchester. 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. As well as its Personal Travel Counsellors, the company has specialist telesales, cruise and business travel divisions. It also has a sister company, Recruitment Counsellors, established in March 2003.

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