

Getting the best out of your RTO

Are you making the most of the huge value a close relationship with your Regional Tourism Organisation can bring to your business? ROBYN BOLTON has some tips.

HOW do you market your tourism business?

A key aspect of your marketing will no doubt involve the establishment and maintenance of relationships with the travel trade, both on and offshore.

Once a relationship has been established most businesses will ensure that all new contacts are added to a database, so that new product updates, business developments, press releases and other correspondence can be easily managed on a regular basis.

These relationships are considered to be valuable (they are the gold), and the maintenance of those relationships is the hallmark of a good tourism business.

But there is one aspect of tourism marketing which is frequently overlooked – and that is ensuring that your RTO knows as much (or more) about what your business offers as your 'trade' contacts.

What is your relationship like with your

Regional Tourism Organisation (RTO)? Do you treat them in the same way as your other marketing contacts? Do you include them in your marketing activities?

Whilst some tourism operators make contact with their RTO from time to time, there are many businesses that simply overlook this most valuable opportunity.

Here are a few tips:

- Keep your RTO apprised of new business developments – just as you would a wholesale or inbound contact.
- Maintain regular contact with your RTO.
- Ensure you know what markets and activities they are involved in.
- Make sure that your RTO is aware of any special areas of interest or focus for your business, such as conference/incentive, food (maybe you have an organic garden) wine, luxury etc.
- If you are planning to undertake sales calls in a specific international market

be sure to speak with your RTO to discuss its current activity in that market, and appraise yourself of other relevant information. Your RTO will frequently be able to assist you with a list of key wholesale contacts should you be planning sales calls.

■ Many RTO's will be only too pleased to look over a new brochure before it goes to print. All too often we are presented with the finished product, only to discover that some vital piece of information is missing: the colour of text renders the brochure unreadable, information is too wordy or the brochure is just too busy. You can never have too many pairs of eyes look over a new brochure!

Don't operate in isolation to your RTO

– understand how they add value to your business and make the best use of this.

Your RTO regularly:

- Makes decisions on the most appropriate product inclusions for visiting media itineraries (both national and international media).
- Fields enquiries from international wholesale contacts concerning new product developments, alternative product opportunities, suggested activities and accommodation options.
- Provides other (specific) advice to international wholesale contacts.
- Attends numerous events, both on and offshore, which involve meetings with product buyers and/or training of reservations staff.

Just as you maintain relationships with your trade contacts, so does your Regional Tourism Organisation. It makes sense that before you attend events such as TRENZ you take the time to update your RTO on your new product developments – after all they will meet with a different selection of contacts to you, and can often be responsible for introducing your business to a valuable new trade contact.

Before you set up a new tourism business, make contact with your RTO (as early as possible). All too often a business turns up on the doorstep of an RTO (long after opening).

Your RTO may be able to help you identify the best target market for your specific business; they may be able to provide you with statistical information and other vital pieces of information. So find out how they can help – well in advance of setting up your new business venture.

Remember each RTO has a slightly different structure and specific activities may vary, but all will be involved to some degree in marketing the region as a tourism destination.

Many will also be involved in destination management issues and some will be involved in business development activities.

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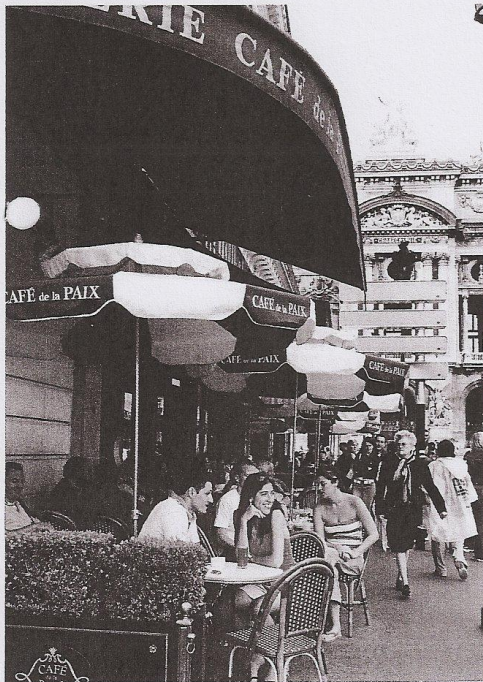


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