

## **TTI Autumn Conference 2002**

### **b2b or not2be**

15th October 2002, Institution of Electrical Engineers, London

With a roster of high profile speakers and a topic that has been widely debated in the travel industry for the past few months, this year's TTI autumn conference boasted record attendance levels and was characterised by lively exchanges between technology and product suppliers.

The day was opened by Jim Mann, Chief Information Officer of TUI Northern Europe. A modern replacement for Viewdata, he said, is now overdue, and can be facilitated through working partnerships within the industry. Pledging TUI's commitment towards multi-channel distribution, Jim advocated the development of a shared travel industry infrastructure and common standards available to all players in the travel industry.

John McQuillan, CEO of technology developer OpenJaw Technologies, introduced the idea of 'Intelligent Dynamic Distribution' as a means to achieve maximum efficiency through the distribution of products at different prices through different channels. This process can be achieved through 'rules engines', flexible and well suited to XML; these enable the creation and application of parameters that conform to business criteria.

B2b distribution through the Internet enables travel agents to keep up with sophisticated customers in a market with ever-shrinking profits, said Roberto da Re, President of travel technology supplier Dolphin Dynamics. He demonstrated how agents can offer their customers low-cost airline bookings in a cost-effective manner through the use of a web-based selling tool, allowing them to check low-cost and special fares for a number of airlines from a single web site.

Brian Shankman, representing Sabre, offered the GDS' perspective on b2b distribution. He admitted that GDSs have so far lacked the flexibility to handle non-air products. Changes are required, he added, to ensure that the GDS fulfils a decision support role, therefore targeting customer requirements more specifically.

B2b partnerships can provide significant competitive advantage for hotels, said Chris Fraser, Managing Director of HotelConnect, an online hotel accommodation wholesaler. He believes that the use of a middleman for hotel contract procurement greatly simplifies the process. XML is

consequently used to seamlessly integrate the middleman's hotel fares database into reseller web sites.

The subject of b2b hotel distribution was further discussed by Heath Kane, Chief Executive of Total Distribution Systems, providers of connectivity between tour operator and wholesaler systems and hotel CRSs. He drew attention to the need for hotel wholesale automation, particularly for the corporate market, the lack of which can seriously impact profitability and productivity.

B2b partnerships in a web portal environment were explored by Louise Corfield and Karen Charles, representing the Travel Channel of UK portal Freeserve. Partnerships are an important element of Freeserve's online content provision. Partnerships should be established with companies that fulfil certain criteria, said Louise and Karen, emphasising the importance of features such as competitive pricing, online booking capability and rebranding opportunities.

The day was brought to a close by the considerations on partnerships of Anna Pollock, CEO of consultancy Desticorp. She commented that the way the travel industry operates is undergoing some radical changes. In an era of 'hypermediation', overinformation and replication of services, she envisaged the winning parties as those players that are able to recognise the value of, and are able to orchestrate, the interactions between the main travel and tourism stakeholders: hosts, product suppliers and consumers. She added that, while the technology to maximise the effectiveness of these interactions already exists, success is largely reliant on the ability to apply this in innovative and imaginative ways.

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