

Are you caught in the Web? If not you're in the minority and are missing out on valuable business. *Travel Weekly* has done the exclusive research to prove it

It wasn't that long ago when the travel industry dismissed the Internet as just a fad that would never catch on.

Not anymore. Companies like Travelocity and Expedia are now major players and have established their brands so well that they are often the first port of call when Internet users are looking to book online.

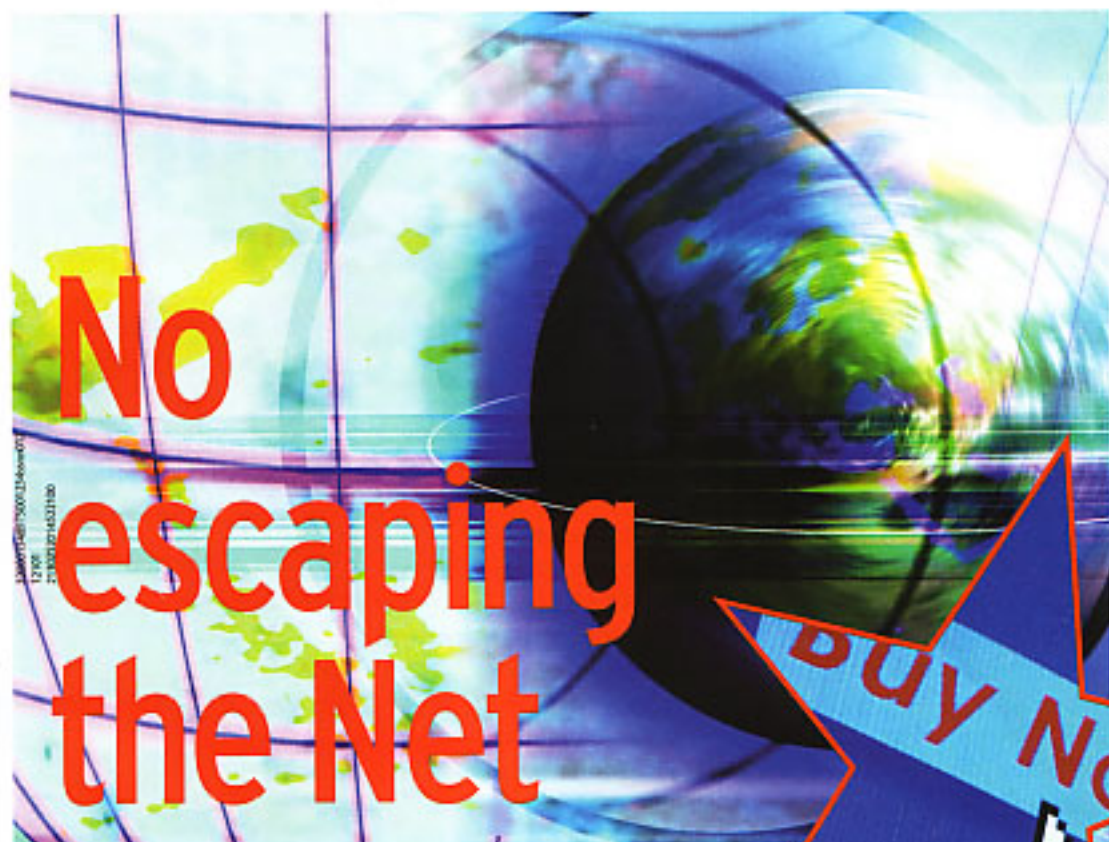
Lastminute.com splashed out £20 million last year on developing its dynamic packaging capability in preparation for a surge in Internet usage in 2004.

And the blizzards of January and February threw up some interesting statistics that should convince even the most sceptical agent to set up a website.

Potential travellers who were snowed in, or who didn't want to venture outside, deserted

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their high-street travel agent and surfed the Net instead.

Online travel agency Air Miles Travel Company reported sales up 10%, while bricks-and-mortar agency Travelcare said sales were down 15% to 20% during the bad weather.

Bad weather or not, it's now essential for agents to have a presence on the web, according to Genesys Travel Technology Consultancy senior partner Paul Richer.

"There will come a time when no business will be taken seriously if it hasn't got a website," he said. "People interested in a particular company expect to find them on the web day or night.

"Increasingly the loyal customers of travel agents want to be able to transact online. At the click of a mouse they will be off to a competitor."

Fortunately, the agency community does appear to have grasped the nettle. According to research carried out by *Travel Weekly* among 200 multiple and independent agents, 61% now have their own website. Of those, 18% say

they generate a lot of business from their site, while 30% say some business comes from it.

The growth of Internet usage is accelerating all the time. In 2000, when Kuoni became the first tour operator to launch a dedicated bookable website for agents, it sold 80% of holidays through brochures.

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Today that figure has gone down to 65%, as more agents and consumers get used to using the Kuoni site to search for information.

Kuoni says 5% of all bookings are now made online

and this figure has grown rapidly in recent months, according to e-business manager Matt Rook.

Interestingly, the past two years has seen a huge shift in the number of bookings coming through the Kuoni website from agents.

In 2002, 90% of business online was direct. Today 60% of online bookings are direct and 40% are from agents.

Superbreak's agent-only site currently accounts for 20% of its total business. However, when looking at business generated via independents, 35% comes online.

"I'd like to see the agent-only website generate 80% of our total business," said sales director Ian Mounser. "The problem is that not all agents have access to the web."

Holiday Extras e-commerce co-ordinator David Stratton said a staggering 60% of all bookings are now made online. Four years ago, the figure was just 1.8%.