

## **OUT OF PRINT?**

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The over-riding message from this week's "Out of Print" conference is that, even though early adopters of e-brochure technology are yielding the benefits, the printed brochure is not yet dead. This was Travel Technology Initiative's ([www.tti.org](http://www.tti.org)) Autumn 2003 conference and covered the topic of e-brochures. Over 140 delegates gathered to hear speakers from tour operators to technology suppliers present and debate the issues. As one speaker put it, rather like viewdata, much of the industry would like to move on to more cost effective technology but the printed brochure is not going to go away.

The conference was opened by Ed Spiers, Director of Anite Travel Systems who presented the results of their e-brochure survey. He highlighted the amount of wastage caused by unwanted brochures. 75% of agents surveyed said that they run out of the brochures they need, yet have far too many of those they do not want. With 60% of operators surveyed stating that their brochure costs are over £1 per copy, clearly the travel industry is a god-send to the paper recycling industry.

Matt Rooke, Kuoni's E-business & Distribution Manager, illustrated the extent of money that could be saved by adopting e-brochures as part of a tour operator's distribution strategy. With the distribution of brochures to consumers accounting for 10% of total print and distribution costs, yet the print cost accounting for only 5%, Kuoni sees good scope for more cost efficient delivery of brochures. The company's answer has been to develop an e-brochure strategy that allows consumers to choose the brochure pages they wish to download. Kuoni is in fact the first tour operator to launch this technology. Whilst their e-brochure initiative has been very well received by consumers, Matt sadly concluded that electronic brochures are not the elixir for reducing print and distribution costs.

The reasoning for this was explored by Paul Markland, Managing Director of BP Travel Marketing Services. Independent focus group work commissioned by BP highlighted just how much consumers appreciate the convenience and portability of printed brochures. They are easier to share, quicker to browse and emotionally more involving than their electronic brethren. In fact, Paul mentioned that one focus group participant enjoyed the smell of printed brochures as it reminded her of holidays. Could seaweed scented brochures be in the offing?

Listening to Paul Markland made me realise that there is a danger inherent in e-brochures of losing some of the intangible qualities of printed brochures that are used to reinforce brand image, such as the quality and thickness of paper. This is a real issue for upmarket operators.

With a convincing argument having been made for printed brochures, Mikael Pehrsson and Graeme Hogg from Hewlett Packard described how their technology can provide really high quality print of very low volume brochures. Cost-wise, this technology is not within reach of the average travel agent, but larger travel companies could use this to create brochures that are individually customised for each client, driven by the characteristics of the customer as held within a travel company's Customer Relationship Management system. This is not vapourware still floating in the air, but is actually being adopted by several car manufacturers.

The HP presentation brought another issue to mind. If e-brochure technology was adopted across the industry with travel agents printing tour operator brochures on demand, who would pay for the cost of print, the agent or the operator? If the operator, how would the print cost be calculated and settled?

A further thought on agents printing brochures on demand, prompted me, as conference moderator, to ask a question of the next speaker, Jeremy Ellis, General Manager, Product Development and Creative Media Services for TUI UK. If agents had the technology to print brochures on demand, they could easily assemble their own multi-operator brochures; for example, 40 pages across six tour operators just including pages that feature the particular destination in which the customer is interested or, indeed, just including those operators that pay the highest commission. Jeremy's response and, in fact, his whole take on e-brochures was that the challenge is to get the right mix of media to sell holidays in the most suitable way for the changing consumer and the most cost effective way to maximise margins.

Jeremy described the extent to which TUI UK has been investing in its content management system, designed to provide one single database of brochure content regardless of the channel it is pushed out to, whether this might be print, Web or CD ROM. This system, EPIC, has been developed in-house and coupled with Media Mogul's image database system, allows TUI UK to produce its own brochure page pdf files, no longer requiring the services of a repro house. This alone is saving TUI UK £500,000 per year.

Highlighting the paper mountain the travel industry creates, Jeremy estimated that the top 4 vertically integrated UK companies produce circa 150 publications per year, between 1 and 5 editions per publication, up to 800 pages per edition with print runs up to 3 million copies.

In complete contrast the top 4's paper mountain, Ronnie Findlay, Managing Director of Own Label Holidays, described his new business concept that could only work with e-brochures. Own Label does what it says on the can, providing travel agents with the opportunity to sell package holidays in their own name and at margins far higher than the commissions earned from selling tour operators' packages. The sale of holidays in-store is neatly driven by the recently launched CheckT system. This features a wall rack of cards illustrating individual holidays. Each card has a bar code that can be swiped at a terminal to provide full details of the holiday. This can be integrated with the agent's Web site allowing customers to take cards home and simply key-in the holiday reference to learn more. Ronnie has high hopes that his new business concept will empower agents to strengthen their brands by selling their own holidays at decent margins.

Following an explanation by Project Manager, Andy Mayes, of how TTI is at the forefront of developing standards to allow all players in the travel industry to share brochure information, the conference concluded with presentations and a heated debate by six e-brochure technology suppliers from Digitalwebbooks, ebxp, inbro, Instant Brochures, Leonardo Media and Travelmedia. Demonstrations of the technology showed just how convenient e-brochures are to use.

What did I conclude from the conference? e-brochures are definitely coming, the benefits are too compelling to ignore but, for now, the traditional holiday brochure is definitely not Out of Print.