

外遊旅行社無須懼怕互聯網 Outbound agents need not fear Internet

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業者倘若掌握竅門，中間人消失的情況未必會在外遊業發生。

Disintermediation may not happen in the outbound industry if its traders learn the tricks.

對外遊業的一項研究

直以來，研究人員大都把目光放在入境旅遊業之上，以致出外旅遊業的研究寥寥可數。議會為此在幾年前邀請了當時的獨立理事李金漢教授，為外遊業進行深入研究，藉以提出令業界更上一層樓的可行方案。研究已於二零零八年完成，研究報告的節本也已刊登於《議會季刊》(見「主題故事」，二零零八年第四期)。

上述研究先對不同規模的五十六家外遊旅行社作面對面的訪問，然後根據訪問內容，把業務種類歸納為九十二項。這些業務種類可以分成十類：旅行團——批發及零售、票務——批發及零售、代訂酒店——批發及零售、機票連酒店套票、商務旅遊、會展獎勵旅遊，以及其他。

研究結果顯示，那些外遊旅行社當年接受訪問時，認為最有可為的業務是：旅行團——零售、會展獎勵旅遊，而最難有所作為的業務則是：代訂酒店——批發及零售、票務——零售。研究報告雖然提出了一些改善業務的建議，但並沒有解釋外遊旅行社為何會有上述看法。自研究完成後，外遊業的基本情況沒有甚麼重大改變，因此假如現在再訪問那些外遊旅行社的話，它們的看法也應沒有甚麼重大改變，而這就是本文提出有關外遊業的一些新看法的基礎。

第一、第二類產品及服務

外遊旅行社為何認為代訂酒店及票務這兩類業務都難有作為？又為何認為旅行團及會展獎勵旅遊都有可為？要回答這兩個問題，就需要明白，在供應商與消費者的交易中，所涉及的產品及服務大致可

A study of the outbound industry

It has always been the case that the inbound industry has attracted so much attention of researchers that its counterpart, the outbound industry, has generated just a few studies. The TIC therefore invited several years ago its then Independent Director Professor Kam-hon Lee to carry out an in-depth study of the outbound industry in a bid to make viable recommendations for its next level of achievement. The study was completed in 2008, and an abridged version of its report was published in *The Voice* (see "Cover Story", No. 4/2008).

In the study, a total of 56 outbound agents with different sizes were interviewed face to face, and 92 business categories were found on the basis of the interviews, which could be classified into 10 categories: package tours - wholesale and retail, ticketing - wholesale and retail, hotel reservation - wholesale and retail, air-plus-hotel packages, corporate/business travel, MICE (meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions) travel, and others.

The study found that these outbound agents, when interviewed back then, considered the business of package tours - retail and MICE travel to be the most encouraging whereas the business of hotel reservation - wholesale and retail, and ticketing - retail to be the least encouraging. Why they held such views was not explained in the study report, though some recommendations for better business performance were given. As the basic situation of the outbound industry has largely been the same since the study was completed, their views should also be more or less the same if they were to be interviewed again now, which serves as the starting point of some new ideas about the industry raised here.

Types I and II products and services

Why is it that outbound agents have considered the business of hotel reservation and ticketing to be the least encouraging? and the business of package tours and MICE travel to be the most encouraging? To answer these two questions, we need to understand that **there are roughly two types of product and service (Type I and Type II) involved in supplier-consumer transactions, and that despite their differences, there is no clear-cut boundary between the two and**

分為兩類(第一類和第二類)。這兩類產品及服務雖然有分別，但兩者間並沒有截然分開的界線，而且在有些情況下，某一類產品及服務可以擁有另一類的一些特質。

典型的第一類產品及服務通常都相當簡單，品質是好是壞很易分辨，因此每每採用「貨到付款」的方式來交易，即商販提供了產品或服務，並且收到款項後，工作就已大抵完成。有些商販在交易完成後，還會提供售後服務，希望自己的這類產品及服務可以擁有一些第二類產品及服務的特質，從而有勝過對手的優勢。銷售典型的第一類產品及服務不需要甚麼高深知識，最困難的地方是吸引顧客，因此傳統的方法就是刊登廣告，削減價錢。

典型的第二類產品及服務卻大相逕庭，因為本身複雜得多，由多個緊密連繫的環節組成，每個環節的優劣都會影響到產品或服務整體的品質，因而整體的品質難以簡單判斷。至於交易方式則有多種變化，有時預付款項，有時繳付定金，還有時分期付款等等。商販在提供第二類產品及服務時，由於往往需要一段時間，即交易要在那段時間後才會完成，所以在過程中需要時刻小心，務使所有環節都能達到顧客的要求。

第一、第二類旅遊產品及服務

回到上面的問題：代訂酒店、代訂機票的業務，為何外遊旅行社都不看好？因為這兩類業務基本上都屬於第一類產品及服務。自從互聯網普及，特別是流動通訊技術急速發展之後，現在不僅向酒店及航空公司的網站直接預訂房間及機票易如反掌，甚至連比較多家酒店及航空公司的房間及機票價錢的網站也如雨後春筍。因此，單純代訂酒店及機票難免變成了典型的第一類產品及服務，這就不足為奇了。話雖如此，外遊旅行社倘若能額外提供切合顧客需要的服務，那樣就有可能使典型的第一類產品及服務變成擁有一些第二類的特質，從而增加競爭力。

另一方面，為何旅行團、會展獎勵旅遊的業務仍有可為？因為這是第二類產品及服務。以旅行團為例，旅客即使報名了，付錢了，但本人仍然要親

in some cases the products and services of one type may possess some features of those of the other.

As typical Type I products and services are generally rather simple and their quality is easy to tell, the mode of transaction is usually one of "payment on delivery", which means the trader's work is largely done when a product or service is delivered and the payment is received. Some traders will provide after-sales service in the hope that their Type I products and services may possess some features of Type II products and services, thus giving them a competitive edge over their rivals. Profound knowledge is hardly required in the sale process of typical Type I products and services, and the most difficult part of it is to attract customers, which is traditionally achieved through placing advertisements and cutting prices.

Typical Type II products and services are very different however, in that they are much more complicated, each product or service having many interweaving components and the quality of each component contributing to the overall quality of the product or service, thus making the overall quality difficult to judge. Their mode of transaction is many and varied: sometimes payment is made in advance, sometimes a deposit is required, sometimes payment is made in instalments. Given that a period of time is often needed in order for the trader to deliver Type II products and services, which means the transaction is not completed until after that period of time, the trader has to be cautious all the time in ensuring that each component can live up to the customer's expectations.

Types I and II travel products and services

Let's get back to the question raised above: why do travel agents not think highly of the business of hotel reservation and air ticket reservation? Because these two areas of business, basically, belong to Type I products and services. Since the Internet has gained popularity and especially after mobile technologies have seen rapid developments, not only has it become child's play now for travellers to book rooms and tickets directly on the websites of hotels and airlines, many websites comparing the prices of rooms and tickets offered by different hotels and airlines have also sprung up. Small wonder, then, that the mere booking of hotel rooms and air tickets has become typical examples of Type I products and services. That said, if outbound agents are able to offer extra and tailor-made services to their customers, they may have a chance of making their typical Type I products and services possess some Type II features, thus increasing their competitiveness.

On the other hand, why is it that the business of package tours and MICE travel is still promising? Because they are Type II products and services. Take the package tour. A traveller, after signing up for a tour and paying the tour fare, has still to fly on a plane, stay at hotels, taste meals, see attractions and return safely to the place of departure before he or she can say that the trip is finished

身坐過飛機，住過酒店，吃過東西，看過景點，而且還要安然返回出發地，那時才算完成了旅程，旅行社的服務才算是完成了。至於會展獎勵旅遊，那可比一般旅行團的要求更高，因為除了交通和住宿之外，還要安排位於目的地的會議及展覽場地，以至行程方面也要更有彈性，有更多選擇。要妥善提供這類產品及服務，需要不少人手、工夫和知識，這些都不是一兩種新科技就可以輕易取代的。

互聯網不能消除外遊旅行社

很多人一直在預測，說互聯網會消除中間人，使供應商與消費者直接交易，從而減低價格。這種說法對了一半，但也錯了一半；關鍵在於產品及服務屬於上述的第一類還是第二類，以及某一類產品及服務有沒有另一類的特質。由於第一類產品及服務本身相當簡單，商販假如無法使他們的產品及服務擁有一些第二類的特質，那他們中間人的地位就可能被消除。至於第二類產品及服務的商販，他們假如不認真提供產品及服務，因而無法令顧客滿意，那他們的產品及服務就會喪失第二類的特質，變成類似第一類的產品及服務。

對於第一類旅遊產品及服務來說，外遊旅行社務須致力於使它們擁有一些第二類的特質，以免互聯網產生消除中間人的作用，就像在很多其他行業那樣。具體方法如何，需要視乎每家外遊旅行社的人手、成本結構、市場定位、經營模式等因素而定，並沒有人適用的萬靈丹。

至於第二類旅遊產品及服務，情況卻比較樂觀。例如以旅行團來說，互聯網只能免除報名及付款過程的麻煩，卻絕不能免除旅遊服務本身，因為旅客必須親身去到目的地，然後返回出發地，那時才算完成了交易。外遊旅行社在提供旅行團的服務時，由於服務牽涉的環節非常多，包括交通、住宿、膳食、觀光等等，它們只要能擔任稱職的監工，確保服務的每個環節都能使旅客滿意，那就不用害怕有天會被消除了。

and the service is delivered by the outbound agent. As for MICE travel, it is even more demanding than ordinary package tours since the venues for conventions and exhibitions at the destinations, apart from transport and accommodation, have to be arranged, and the activities on the itinerary have to be more flexible and with greater variety. To provide this type of travel product and service in a satisfactory way needs plenty of manpower, effort and expertise, which could hardly be replaced easily by one or two new technologies.

Internet can't eliminate outbound agents

Many people have kept predicting that the Internet will eliminate middlemen by putting suppliers in direct contact with consumers, thus reducing prices. This view is half right and half wrong; it all depends on whether the products and services in question belong to Type I or Type II mentioned earlier, and whether the products and services of one type possess features of those of the other type. Since Type I products and services are rather simple, their traders as middlemen may be cut out by the Internet if they fail to make their products and services possess some Type II features. As for traders of Type II products and services, if they perfunctorily deliver them, thus failing to satisfy their customers, then their products and services may lose Type II features and become similar to Type I products and services.

As far as Type I travel products and services are concerned, outbound agents need to strive to make them possess some Type II features in order to avoid the disintermediation effect brought about by the Internet in so many other industries. How it can be achieved, specifically, hinges on many factors including the manpower, cost structure, market position and business model of individual outbound agents, and there simply is no panacea suitable for all.

As for Type II travel products and services, the situation is more optimistic. In the case of a package tour, for example, the Internet can only get rid of the trouble of signing up for the tour and paying the tour fare, but never the travel service itself. A traveller has to go to the destination in person and then return to the place of departure - only then can the transaction be said to be completed. Outbound agents need not be afraid of being eliminated one day as long as they, when delivering the travel service of a package tour, which involves many components such as transport, accommodation, meals and sightseeing, can make sure, by acting as competent supervisors, that each component of the service is provided to the satisfaction of the travellers.



提供第二類旅遊產品及服務

雖然第二類旅遊產品及服務主要包括旅行團及會展獎勵旅遊，但由於旅行團會影響到一般旅客，所以這裡只談旅行團。為旅行團提供服務的交易過程大致由兩個步驟構成：首先是吸引顧客報名並付款，然後是在一段時間內提供服務。第一步的重點是吸引顧客，第二步則是設法使旅客滿意服務。**第一步要成功，一般的做法不外乎比價錢，比特色，比方便等等，但還有經常被忽略的一點，那就是比實話實說，即千萬不可在廣告中誇張失實，也不可使用誤導的宣傳手法。**比如說在旅行團的廣告中，如果住宿地點是「甲酒店或乙酒店或同級酒店」，那麼甲酒店和乙酒店就必須屬於同一級別(詳情見通告C1544)。

至於第二步的成功法門，即在提供服務時使旅客滿意，方法千差萬別，但可簡單分為積極與消極兩方面。「積極」的方面是指，外遊旅行社對交通、住宿、觀光等各種安排，都盡可能令旅客滿意，甚至超出他們的預期。至於「消極」的方面，是指外遊旅行社如何處理旅客在旅途上可能碰到的種種問題，例如丟失旅遊證件、行李被竊、航班延誤等小問題，以及交通意外、天災、恐怖襲擊等大問題。旅行團可貴的地方，在於外遊旅行社憑藉本身的豐富經驗、專門知識、當地人脈等優越條件，為旅客豎起保護罩，使他們能安心享受旅途上的多種體驗。

外遊旅行社須證明本身價值

丹麥童話作家安徒生(1805-1875)在自傳中主張：「旅遊就是生活」，這句話對於二十一世紀的不少香港人來說，可謂對得出奇，因為他們一有空就會遠遠近近到處旅遊。今天旅遊的風險雖然遠遠少於一百年前，但也絕不能說全無風險。因此，外遊旅行社無論是售賣第一類還是第二類旅遊產品及服務，假如想繼續發展的話，今後都必須竭力向顧客證明本身的價值：向旅行社購買旅遊產品及服務的話，即使在出發前、旅途中或回程後碰到或大或小的問題，旅行社也可以幫他們解決。 

Providing Type II travel products and services

Although Type II travel products and services mainly include package tours and MICE travel, only package tours are discussed here as they concern ordinary travellers. The transaction process of delivering services for package tours is roughly made up of two steps: first, to attract customers to sign up and make payment and second, to deliver the services within a certain period of time. The focuses of the first and second steps are, respectively, on attracting customers and on ensuring that they are satisfied with the services. **To succeed in the first step, the general approach is to compete on price, on features, on convenience and so on, but there is one more thing that is often ignored: to compete on honesty by never exaggerating in advertisements or using misleading promotional tactics.** For example, in a package tour advertisement, if the place of accommodation for the tour group is "A Hotel or B Hotel or another hotel of the same rating", then the A Hotel and the B Hotel must be of the same rating (see Circular C1544 for details).

Despite there being many a way to success in the second step, namely to make travellers satisfied when the services are provided, it has, put simply, two sides, the active and the passive. The "active" side means that outbound agents need to make such arrangements as transport, accommodation and sightseeing as satisfying to the travellers as possible, or even beyond their expectations. As for the "passive" side, it refers to how outbound agents will handle all kinds of problem the travellers may run into during their journey: small problems such as lost travel documents, stolen luggage, flight delays, etc, and big ones such as traffic accidents, natural disasters, terror attacks, etc. The value of a package tour lies in its outbound agent's ability to erect a protective shield for the travellers through its unique advantages such as broad experience, professional knowledge and local connections so that they can enjoy various kinds of experience with their mind at ease.

Outbound agents need to prove their value

Danish fairy tale writer Hans Christian Andersen (1805-1875) asserts in his autobiography that "to travel is to live", which, to many 21st-century Hongkongers, is amazingly true as they will grab every available moment to travel to places near and far. Travel in today's world is much safer than a century ago, but it is nowhere near a risk-free world. **Outbound agents, whether they sell Type I or Type II travel products and services, need to exert themselves from now on if they wish to continue to thrive, in an effort to prove their value to travellers that they can help them resolve problems big and small should they bump into any before, during and after their journey.** 