管理顧客　管理未來
Manage customers and manage future

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根據最近一項關於美國互聯網使用者的調查，網上最普遍的活動是使用電郵(百分之七十七)，其次是搜尋資料(百分之六十三)。雖然香港沒有類似的調查，但假如調查的話，香港人使用互聯網的方式應該大同小異。網上資料的數量既十分龐大，而用來找出所需資料的搜尋器又非常厲害，一個無可避免的結果，就是**消費者越來越質疑不同行業的業者所提供的知識和服務，而旅行社也不能倖免。**

利潤受壓

以前，旅行社差不多壟斷了旅遊資訊，所以除了售賣旅遊產品外，簡直可以說是藉着販賣旅客難以拿到手的外地寶貴旅遊資訊來為生的。但**現在，旅行社發現旅客有了互聯網的幫助後，對目的地的瞭解，不會輸於任何一家旅行社，因此他們就不再滿足於事先安排妥當的旅遊產品了。**這些新一代的旅客，人數不斷增加，整個行業的經營模式最終必定會因而改變。

就彷彿碰到難以滿足的顧客還不夠糟糕似的，旅行社發現委託商正嘗試直接與顧客交易，令它們的利潤受損。**近年機票價格持續下降，航空公司為了挽救本身的年終盈利，已變得不願支付旅行社一向賴以為生的佣金了。**

脫困之道

出現了上述情況，也就難怪不少旅行社訴苦，說經營環境每況愈下，而出現轉機的希望卻杳不可尋了。但其實事情不需要那麼看的。議會主席何栢霆先生，在香港資訊科技商會近日舉辦的座談會上(見「議會簡報」)，要言不煩地說出了旅行社可能的脫困之道：「**今天，旅行社應該把**

According to a recent survey about American Internet users, the use of email was the top Internet activity (77%) and search engine use came second (63%). Although there is not any similar survey about Hong Kong's Internet users, it is most likely that a similar usage pattern will be revealed if one such survey is done. With an abundant amount of information on the Web and very powerful search engines to locate the information needed, an inevitable consequence is that consumers tend more and more to challenge the knowledge and services provided by people of various trades, including travel agents.

Squeeze on profits

Previously, travel agents depended on a near monopoly on travel information to survive. They literally sold valuable information on overseas destinations which could not be easily obtained by travellers, as well as the travel products themselves. Now, they find that their customers are no longer satisfied with pre-arranged products because they, with the help of the Internet, are as knowledgeable about a destination as any agents. This new generation of travellers, with their numbers steadily growing, are destined to change the business model of the whole industry.

As if being confronted by demanding customers is not bad enough, travel agents find that their principals are trying to deal directly with consumers, thus squeezing their profits. In recent years, air fares have continued to fall; and in order to salvage their own bottom line, airlines have become reluctant to pay commission to agents, which used to live on it.

The way out

Little wonder so many travel agents have moaned about a business environment getting harsher and the hope of a turnaround getter dimmer. But things need not be viewed that way. Mr Ronnie Ho, Chairman of the TIC, pithily captured a potential solution to their current difficulties at a seminar recently held by the Hong Kong Information Technology Federation (see "Bulletin"):

自己看作是為顧客服務，而不是為委託商服務。」

旅行社當然是為顧客服務，不是嗎？不錯，旅行社的確把機票、旅行團或其他旅遊產品賣給顧客；但僅只那樣就足以說是真正為越來越見多識廣的顧客提供服務嗎？**比如說有一個老主顧，提到他一直都想嚐嚐西班牙阿布衣(el Bulli)餐廳的美食，但這家普遍認為是全球最佳的餐廳只在四月至九月營業，究竟有沒有旅行社可以為這名講究飲食的旅客，在別的地方安排一次美食之旅？**

管理顧客

拜互聯網所賜，旅客手上都有大量資訊，旅行社單單聽旅客之命恐怕未必足以生存下去。**旅行社必須學習怎樣積極地管理顧客，而不是消極地做顧客的僕人。在這方面有三個相關概念值得考慮：獲取顧客、抓緊顧客、起復顧客。**

大多數旅行社現在都似乎只關心怎樣獲取顧客，而方法卻一成不變，都是割價，都是希望在推廣期間吸引越多顧客就越好。至於抓緊顧客，是指把獲取了的顧客轉變成忠心的顧客。要那樣做的話，旅行社需要瞭解顧客，找出他們的年齡、家庭成員、職業、喜好等資料，然後為他們量體裁衣般設計旅遊服務，務求完全切合他們的需要。所謂起復顧客，是說費力把已經沒有再光顧的老主顧變成再次光顧的顧客。各種研究都證實，**抓緊顧客所帶來的盈利，比獲取顧客遠遠高得多；而即便是起復顧客，也都比獲取顧客能帶來較多盈利。**

從這個角度看來，不惜一擲千金以求獲取顧客的旅行社有那麼多，但積極投資在抓緊顧客和起復顧客之上的旅行社卻又那麼少，委實令人詫異。儘管有些旅行社購買了顧客關係管理的系統以抓緊、起復顧客，但顧客管理的概念不僅是使用電腦軟件而已。**簡單來說，顧客管理的關鍵在於旅行社的心態：旅行社必須真心把顧客當作活生生的人來看待，而不是賬目上一堆堆的數字。**只有用這方法，旅行社才能真正管理顧客，並進而管理自己的未來。🔲

"Nowadays, travel agents should consider themselves to be serving their customers, rather than their principals."

Travel agents are of course serving their customers, aren't they? Yes, they sell them air tickets, packages or other travel products; but can that only be said to be really serving customers much more sophisticated than before? If, for example, a regular customer mentions that he always wanted to dine at el Bulli, which is widely believed to be the best restaurant in the world and which only opens from April to September, can any agent help this gourmet arrange another gastronomic trip instead of going to Spain?

Managing customers

Now that travellers have plenty of information in hand thanks to the Internet, simply taking orders from them is no longer a ticket to continuous survival. Instead of being passive servants to customers, travel agents must learn to actively manage them. There are three concepts relevant in this respect: acquisition, retention and reactivation of customers.

At present, acquiring new customers seems to be the focus of most agents. Invariably, they slash prices to attract as many customers as possible during the promotion period. Retaining customers means to convert acquired customers into loyal customers. To do that, agents need to understand their customers by finding out, for example, their ages, family composition, occupations, preferences, and then provide them with tailor-made travel services which perfectly match their needs. Reactivating customers refers to spending efforts to make old customers who no longer buy from them buy from them again. Research has repeatedly confirmed that it is much more profitable to retain existing customers than to acquire new ones, and that even reactivating lapsed customers is more profitable than acquiring new ones.

Seen in this light, it is quite amazing to find that whereas so many agents are willing to spend big money on acquiring new customers, so few of them are keen on investing in customer retention and reactivation. Although some agents have bought Customer Relationship Management systems for that purpose, the concept of customer management is more than using computer software. In a nutshell, it is about the mentality of agents: they have to sincerely care about their customers as human beings rather than regarding them as figures in their account books. Only in this way can agents really manage their customers and thus manage their own future. 🔲