

Opinion Piece: **Mind the generation gap**

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Imagine a new technology that is accepted and welcomed by today's most experienced travel agents, yet which excites the very best of the next generation. Jason Nash discusses technology that does just that.

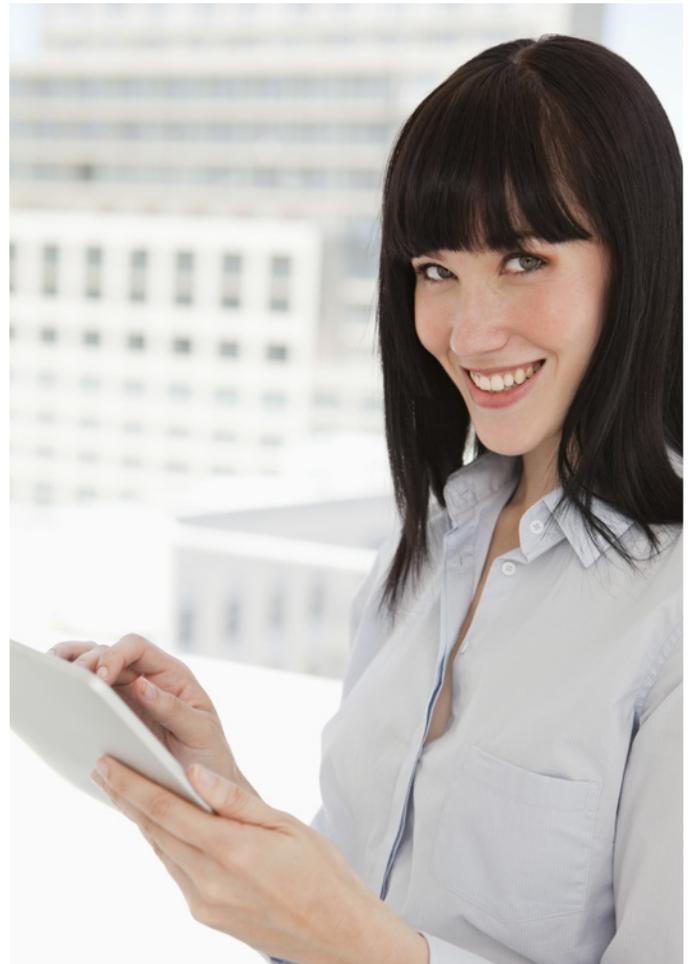
Travel agencies are people businesses.

Without the right sort of people talking to customers, travel agencies simply couldn't operate. They depend upon staff with excellent interpersonal skills; people who know about good travel experiences and are passionate about talking about them. You can tell when you're in a great travel agency by the enthusiasm of the staff.

And yet a great travel agency cannot survive on personality alone. The travel industry was, after all, one of the first to embrace the Internet in the 1990s, since it meant global distribution systems (GDS) could provide travel agents with fast access to the best hotels and the most competitive flights.

Looking at those early computer systems today, with their basic, database-driven interfaces, it's easy to forget just how much of a revolution this was at the time. Today's systems provide travel agents access to a wealth of up-to-date content. But the user experience is actually very similar.

Nonetheless, travel agents have become masters at skillfully navigating the GDS cryptic screen, which has become the industry's standard interface. For many, the prospect of moving away from it can seem daunting, unnecessary and at worst, even a little threatening.



But now there are new kids on the block – and for them, the traditional interfaces aren't appealing. The so-called Y generation – a group who will make up 75% of the world's workforce by 2025¹ – has grown up surrounded by the Internet and mobile technology. For these people, traditional cryptic screens will appear complicated and unnecessary.

And of course, people in this generation are not just employees of the travel industry, but customers too. Travel agents need to satisfy the expectations of this new group of travelers, who are used to surfing the Internet regularly and accessing everything on their smartphones.

¹ Generation Y women in the workplace, Business and Professional Women's Foundation, http://www.bpwfoundation.org/documents/uploads/YC_SummaryReport_Final.pdf

All of this leaves travel agencies in something of a dilemma. They clearly need to embrace the modern technologies offered by their GDS providers; they need to take full advantage of new functionality while attracting the next generation of great travel agents and travelers, too. But they must try to do so without alienating more experienced staff.

So why not do both? This is the design logic behind emerging travel solutions such as Travelport Smartpoint App™ and Travelport Universal Desktop™. Both Y generation and more mature travel agents will be comfortable with these new desktop interfaces.

Travelport Smartpoint App is an overlay on the existing Worldspan Go!™ and Galileo Desktop™ products that provides point and click functionality. It offers more mature and experienced agents the ability to operate in a familiar yet improved environment. The customizable work areas, quick keys to external websites and applications as well as enhanced search capabilities, help them work in a more effective manner. Thanks to the point and click environment and interactive capabilities, the Y generation agents do not require as much training. This means they can be up and running within no time; providing the level of service their customers expect.

Travelport Universal Desktop takes it a step further and is truly a flexible solution. As soon as you look at it you can see the difference however, if preferred, agents can continue to operate in the cryptic environment for as long as they like. With tools such as 'drag and drop' and modern graphics, the desktop looks and feels just like surfing the web. It puts a world of information at your fingertips, offering more supplier options and ancillary services



than earlier platforms. Either solution can meet the different needs of your workforce, while improving both process efficiency and productivity.

Technologies such as these show that you can really mind the generation gap at the same time you mind your business.

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