SELLING
FLEXIBLE INDEPENDENT TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS

THE TRAVEL AGENT’S GUIDE TO PACKAGING, PERSONALIZING AND PRODUCING PREMIUM, TAILOR MADE, FLEXIBLE INDEPENDENT TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS

THE TRAVEL AGENT’S STORE
Where travel agents shop for Educational tools...and more!
sales - marketing - presentations - management
Selling Flexible Independent Travel Arrangements
The Travel Agent's Guide to Packaging, Personalizing and Producing Premium, Tailor Made, Flexible Independent Travel Arrangements

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Welcome!

You’ve selected an excellent topic to explore. The art of arranging customized travel arrangements has been a travel trade skill since the mid-1800s and even before the travel agent role we know today existed. This guide will help you plan how to sell your FIT Services versus products and price.

The first thing you must do is shed the typical travel agency mindset that revolves around selling packages and making 10% commission.

Also when you sell FIT SERVICES you are not selling products and you are not looking for 10%. What you are doing is packaging yourself and your skills and marketing the fact that YOU are the key to a well-planned, customized itinerary. You will charge fees for your services AND generate commissionable income from the components you arrange.

When it comes to selling flexible independent travel arrangements (FITs) you will find your preferred supplier’s group department eager to help you price your itineraries. Learn as much as you can from your group department contacts. They have the inside track and the contacts you need to access.

Here’s to your continued success!

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THE TRAVEL AGENT’S STORE COACHING PROGRAM

To help you get the maximum benefit from your purchase The Travel Agent’s Store offers a free coaching session with the author of the e-Guide. The coaching sessions last for up to one-hour and are conducted via Skype. Once you have read through and studied this e-Guide jot down any questions, challenges you have, then email to steve@thetravelagentsstore.com to arrange a coaching date and time.

Be sure to take advantage of this offer!
THE 4 FIT OPPORTUNITIES

These FOUR FIT OPPORTUNITIES are a result of the very foundation of the FIT product. The foundation or the root of the FIT model is FLEXIBILITY.

To take advantage of these opportunities and to prosper you must first acknowledge the following:

1. You must be 100% well informed about your supplier’s products and that means you have read each and every page, package, component, excursion and the fine print to the point that your knowledge appears magical to your clients and colleagues.

2. You must develop your own high level contacts at the resorts, tour companies and at the tourism offices of the destinations you wish to sell.

3. You must determine your FIT fees worthy of your experience, knowledge, skills and talents.

4. You must be aware of the time involved to produce a quality FIT arrangement.

A recent survey asking travel agents what prevented them from suggesting an FIT arrangement produced these results:

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Do not be shy about charging what you are worth. FIT is not about 10% commission it’s about your value at $125 / hour.
Creating Your FIT Specialty Service

When you create an FIT specialty service or department you’ll have the opportunity to market that specific service as you prospect for leads outside the generic ITC / packaged vacation.

Consider the opportunity to create a custom planning division or department in your agency. Depending upon the size of your agency and number of staff, you could quite easily establish such a department by drawing on the inherent knowledge and skills of your agency team. If not the team approach then perhaps the FIT specialist will be you, the owner-manager or a lead consultant.

For the home-based agent, having a planned and ready to invoke custom vacation planning service, could lead to a host of custom planning projects allowing you to leave behind the low cost bookings.

Your new department could be all things to all people or you may wish to focus on one niche market such as weddings & honeymoons, retirement dream trips, golf tours and even business trips. It’s your call as to what you specialize in. Once you decide on the main type of travel, or destination focus you can then decide the name of your new FIT department.

The name of this new service should be current and edgy enough to attract new customers and especially those customers who share a passion for your passion and the niche market you are promoting. Hopefully you will also attract the true FIT customer – those that prefer to travel on their own schedule and willing to pay a premium to do so.

Naming Your New FIT Service / Department

The name of your FIT service should contain words such as ‘custom’ or ‘tailor-made’ or ‘made for you’, ‘built for you...’ etc. There is a word often associated with custom services and it is ‘bespoke’. This word is mostly used in the UK and used in this way, Bespoke Tailors... indicating that this clothing shop offers custom or tailor-made suits for instance. The word bespoke is not well known or used in North America. This presents an opportunity to stand out from the FIT crowd if you are willing to explain the word many times over until it takes hold. However it’s probably better to stick with words that are well known such as customized and personalized.
You’ve heard it all before. They’re everywhere! Is it true? Pretty much. As long as you are focused on your specialty then you can target your intended client with some accuracy. Should you not focus and try to FIT any and all things travel – your marketing will be scattered with little to no effect on your sales.

In your own community, around the big city, across your state, province, territory, country and even overseas, there are people who fit into the FIT criteria. Not only do they fit the FIT criteria, they are wanting to book what might be called a regular vacation, but they want to do it on their terms.

**The FIT Couple**
Here’s two people of any age, culture, background, education etc., and what they want to do is take off on a long desired adventure trip. They want to create their own itinerary and timing.

**The FIT Wedding Couple**
Similar to the FIT Couple only here the bride and groom are nudists and want to go for a naked bungee “I dooooooooooo!” No worries. You can arrange that especially for them.

**The FIT Group**
The FIT group client might consist of club members wanting to golf around the world. Could be members of a photography club who desire a 3-week staycation in Lima, Peru with 7 side trips to be arranged. The family reunion of 250 people. The wedding party attending the nude bungee jump. The corporate group who want to hold a summit meeting literally on top of a mountain that everyone on their team can climb.

Generally the FIT customer is someone who is booking outside the established departure dates and looking for a certain quality of accommodation and itinerary that cannot be packaged.
Marketing Your FIT Services

The focus now is on promoting your Personalized, Premium, Tailor Made, Flexible, Bespoke and Independent Travel Services. Looks like we covered all the headings! You can choose all of them or just the one or two you prefer.

Just to repeat – your focus here is to sell YOU and your SERVICES first. In this way you will attract clients in need of your skills and those clients will turn out to be clubs, groups, associations, corporations, families, school teachers and even tour guides who have an established following.

Once you have marketed your FIT planning services and have established your name as an FIT Specialist, then you can start creating and marketing your own tours with the caution that you will be going On Risk.

Marketing Means…

The word marketing can conjure up many types of activities from advertising to promotions to social media and so for our purpose here, marketing shall mean ALL activities that get the word out about your FIT Services. When it comes to SELLING your services, then that’s where you’ll be talking about the Features and Benefits of doing business with you. For now, it’s marketing time. Once you attract a client, then you start to sell and close the sale. Here’s a basic diagram of how your marketing plan will work and as you can see, 99% of your marketing activity will revolve around your website.

Here’s what we’re going to explore now:

1. Mass Market: Newspaper, Radio, Advertorials, Media Releases
2. Targeted: Direct Mail, Direct E-Mail, Newsletters
3. Online Marketing: Viral Marketing, E-Magazines, YouTube, Slideshare
4. Social Marketing: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr
5. Agency Events & Tradeshows: Local Bookstore, Hotel, Art Gallery, Museum, Restaurant
The Facebook Timeline Cover Real Estate

Don’t miss out on using and applying this marketing real estate to talk up your FIT services. It’s FREE ad space at the moment. Here are the cover image dimensions if you don’t have them.

Change Your Timeline Cover Anytime
Time to create a series of promotional images sized to the Facebook cover. You might retain a certain theme related to a specific destination. Here’s one example focusing on Japan – the location is a 17th century cemetery located close to Fukoji Temple, Omuta, Kyushu. It’s knowing your favourite places, your special places and using them to promote the fact, as you see below, that your clients need YOU to arrange their FIT if they wish to visit this place for themselves.

Create a list of images and slogans and FIT services then set the change dates. Change the cover image as planned.
About The Author

Steve Crowhurst  
Travel trade keynote speaker, trainer, author & publisher.

Steve entered the retail travel industry in 1965 and has worked from the front line to the executive floor, owned and operated his own travel agencies, travel trade training and consulting firms and has worked from a home office for over 20 years.

In 2010 he published his 412 page book 273 “No Fluff - No Theory” Marketing Ideas for Travel Agents; in June 2011 he published the first digital issue of Selling Travel magazine, this was followed by Travel Agency Manager and Travel Trade Supplier magazines in early 2013.

In October 2013 Steve published the first issue of IC Travel Agent a digital magazine targeting the home-based travel agent, ICs and OSRs.

Steve’s main focus for his keynote speeches, training sessions and publications is to help the retail travel agent generate more business.

If you would like Steve to speak at your conference or convention, deliver management level webinars or work with your executive team please email him directly:

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A complete bio can be read here.