ATDSFL Champions of Learning Best Practices Submission Form

Collector:	Web Link 2 (Web Link)
Started:	Friday, April 26, 2019 5:19:10 PM
Last Modified:	Sunday, April 28, 2019 3:39:45 AM
Time Spent:	Over a day
IP Address:	98.242.175.61

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Q1 Organization (as printed on certificate):

Bahamas Tourist Office

Q2 Project/Initiative Title:

Bahamas Specialist Program

Q3 Name of Person Submitting:

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Q7 Write a brief summary of your project/initiative. Please limit your response to between 150 and 200 words.

My project is the Bahamas Specialist! Program. This program is an on-line training initiative on the Bahamas assets. It is formulated into three modules each with examinations and pop quizzes. The modules or steps are as follows:

• Step 1 – Finding the right island- this module gives an overview of each of the destinations 16 islands
• Step 2- Finding the right venue – this module gives a description of a selection of venues on each of the 16 islands with links for additional and specific info.
• Step 3 – Finding the right experiences – this module captures the various experiences that each of the 16 islands offer.

A resource center is also included where participants can review brochures (digital and PDF's), links and an array of videos. Once a user completes the program with at least an eighty percent score, they can graduate and receive a graduate certificate.   We partnered with Travel Agent Academy for facilitation and The Travel Institute for Continued Education Units. Participants can register for the program and complete it at their leisure. Once completed, they are considered "Bahamas Specialist," they receive a Bahamas pin and twenty-five dollars after their first 2-night booking.
www.bahamasspecialistprogram.com.

Q8 What was the business/organizational need that led to this initiative? Please limit your response to between 150 and 200 words.

In 2015 I found that the organization needed to reconnect with professional travel agents. On the one hand, the industry was heavily dependent on the DOT coms – or Online Travel Agencies (OTA's) like Expedia and Travelocity for vacation bookings. Consumers were either booking through the OTA's or directly with the airlines or hotels for their personal travel needs, rather than going to a travel agent. Similarly, organizations like ours were heavily focused on a pull strategy.

However, the tides began to shift and consumers were realizing that without a travel agent they were truly on their own. They realized that when things went wrong they had no backup and no one to speak for them. On the one hand travel agents were professionalizing themselves, regrouping and banding together through consortia and host agencies - this for legal, marketing and training purposes. Consumers began realizing that they would be better off going to a travel agent. On the other hand, we realized that more than 30% of visitors to the Bahamas booked in part or whole through a travel agent. Because of these realizations, we needed a push strategy to educate and grow the Bahamas business through the travel trade.

Q9 What actions did you take that led to the success of this initiative? Please limit your response to between 400 and 500 words.

In 2016 we developed our Bahamas Specialist Program and in 2017 we launched the Bahamas Rewards Program. A couple of actions was developed to ensure continued success of the program: These included the following:
1. A marketing campaign was developed to grow participation in the program and to increase graduate levels and percentages.
2. We knew that we didn't have the technology or the staff to support such a large educational program, so partnered with a couple of entities; including Travel Agent Academy to host the program and provide technical support. We also partnered with The Travel Institute which is a certifying body for the industry which would allow us to apply for continued education units (CEU's) for each of our educational initiatives. In this case we were granted CEU's for the specialist program.
3. We were also able to access the databases of each of these companies. Travel Agent Academy which is a media conglomerate in the Travel Industry with a database of more than 70,000 travel professionals. The Travel Institute has a database of more than 48,000.
4. The 'Bahamas Rewards and Booking Incentive Program' was developed to support and encourage travel agents to not only graduate from the existing Bahamas Specialist Program, but to also do business with the destination and be rewarded for it. Agents were rewarded based on a couple of qualifiers. If they booked two nights or more after graduation from the specialist program they automatically got a $25.00 check. If they booked 2 nights or more they also got to participate in a monthly raffle whereby they were able to win Bahamas gear items, prizes, gift cards or cash.
5. We also developed a quarterly and yearly booking incentive program that is based on consumed room nights. This means that the agent can only qualify after their clients have verifiably traveled. Rewards for the yearly and quarterly winners range from $250.00 to $2,500.00 as well as Bahamas Bleisure Benefits.

Bleisure Benefits include reimbursement up to a certain amount for travel to the destination – on hotel, air and tours. The goal is to encourage those agents that are truly selling the Bahamas to see the destination.

We developed a micro site for agents to register their bookings. We are able to see on an on-going basis just where in the Bahamas the agents are sending their clients, which island they are sending them to, which hotels they are utilizing and which tour operator they booked through. The most important aspect of this is the amount of revenue that is being recorded. Through these actions, we are able to track the success in dollars. We know that the amount of registered bookings is growing and so is the amount of revenue generated. www.rewards.bahamasspecialistprogram.com

Q10 What outcomes resulted from your initiative and how did you measure them? Please limit your response to between 250 and 300 words.

Enrollees of the Bahamas specialist program includes all who have registered. Since 2016 we now have over 8,900 enrollees from which there are over 3000 graduates. Graduates qualify to begin registering their Bahamas bookings through the Bahamas Rewards program. The number of bookings registered in the Bahamas Rewards program are currently 1,308 with a total revenue of $5,327,657.09. Beside these, additional outcomes and measurements are as follows:

• Those enrolled have been entered into a database that is used by the Bahamas business development managers (BDM's) in the various territories as a pool from which they can work. The BDM's know that these agents are familiar with the product through the training modules and have either graduated or is still enrolled. Most importantly they know who is sending business to the Bahamas and they can now build a relationship with these individuals to continue growing their Bahamas business.

• Graduates are those who have completed the three steps and have passed all their examinations. They are now considered Bahamas specialists and are encouraged to participate in other educational and training programs so that they can continue to improve their knowledge base. These include Bahamas Workshops, Bahamas Webinars, and Bahamas Familiarization trips. Most importantly they are encouraged to record their bookings so that they can be rewarded for sending business to the destination and we in turn can measure and track those bookings.

All in all, outcomes include a listing of those agents we can do business with, who want to do business with us, whom we can reward and from which we can directly track and measure our efforts. We are also able to see booking trends, including the number of nights books, through which entities clients were booked, the hotels booked, and the amount of revenue generated.

Q11 What information would be vital for other organizations to know if they wanted to replicate your initiative? Please limit your response to between 250 and 300 words.

The following information would be vital for other organizations to know if the wanted to replicate this initiative:
• Be open to outsourcing various components of your training program; that is in areas where you are lacking or in need of more expertise. For my organization, the largest impediment was the technology needed to run such a large educational program. We chose Travel Agent Academy (TAA) because of their technology and expertise in the area of facilitating on-line educational programs.

• Make a plan. If we fail to plan, we often plan to fail. Make your plan as detailed as possible with specific learner outcomes. Make sure the plan lines up with the organizations efforts. This is an area where you can become innovative and try to roll out your initiative in as creative a way as is possible. In this case instead of a three-chapter training program, I was able to organize a user friendly three-step program.

• It is okay to release training in phases when you are beginning to establish programs. The educational programs that I've developed are being released in phases: The first phase was the Bahamas Specialist Program, it formed the nucleus of all the educational and training programs that my department is rolling out. The second phase was the Bahamas Rewards Program which was launched a year after the first program. Other educational and training initiatives include webinars, workshops and virtual or machine learning initiatives.

• Be passionate: you must enjoy what you are doing because it will require determination and expertise. Building content for programs is no small task; the time, effort and dedication is above the norm; so, you must be dedicated to the task completion.

• Lastly, be able to measure: It is important to measure your efforts.