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# Relationships are key: formal & informal

***“Networking, nurturing and good communication are key in our industry. It is all about building relationships (formal and informal), and sharing new ideas and processes to grow business. Face to face relationships can be built through regular attendance at workshops, meetings, seminars and events. Phone calls don’t go amiss either. Keep in touch!”***

Ginette Goulston-Lincoln, Travel Trade Consultant, Liverpool

### Focus on building industry relationships and have that ‘elevator pitch’ ready

Building relationships with distribution trade partners is critical to your success in the international marketplace. This is a relationships industry and nothing beats face-to-face contact either via formal meetings such as sales calls, staff training and trade shows, or via informal networking opportunities such as industry social nights and trade event social functions either pre-planned or unplanned.

At all times, be prepared to deliver your elevator pitch – secure their interest in your product. Be prepared to highlight who you are and what your company and products are about. You should be able to do this quickly, and your listener should walk away with good information and a desire to know more.

Whether you are at a trade show, networking event or scheduled sales call, the key to a successful elevator pitch is to focus on your compelling selling points – your unique assets that make you stand out that you would have defined in your marketing plan.



### Top tips for building industry relationships

- Your pitch should take no longer than 30-60 seconds or be no more than a couple of sentences
- Use language that everyone understands, don’t use fancy words or jargon
- Tell a story and make it entertaining
- Aim your pitch at a specific audience. If you have a few diverse target markets, you might want to develop a unique pitch for each
- Have a clear goal in mind of what you want to achieve
- Briefly describe your product but do not go into excruciating detail
- Have a hook at the beginning - something that attracts your listener’s attention and makes them want to know more
- Explain the benefit your product gives to people – why they love your experience
- Be passionate. This is your business, be proud to promote it!
- At the end of your pitch, ask for something - do you want their business card, to schedule a meeting or to go into more in-depth training information?

### Why are sales calls and staff training essential?

Maintaining regular contact with your distribution partners and providing them with updated product information helps foster strong relationships. Face-to-face sales calls are an excellent way of building rapport.

Remember, distribution partners are like an extension of your sales and marketing force, therefore you need to ensure they are always kept up to date and know how to best sell your product. Once you have established a relationship with the distribution partner and they have begun using your product, you should train and educate their staff so they are able to effectively sell your product.

It is also a good idea to train staff when your product is being featured in any special campaigns or promotions.

### When and how often?

Plan a sales call schedule each year as part of your marketing activity, and book appointments well in advance (at least a month).

The number of times you visit on a sales call or training will depend on how much business, current and potential, they generate for you. Speak with the Product Manager, as you will find some companies are more flexible with training than others. Remember, distribution partners are busy people; don't visit them more often than you need to.

For international sales calls, the timing of your visit is also important and this will vary from market to market, so don't just plan around your overseas holiday. When planning individual sales calls in market for the first time, contact your local DMO as they may be able to assist with planning and introductions to key wholesalers and travel agents on your first sales visits.

Always keep in mind that distribution partners, whether in England or overseas, have peak working months or periods where they are on reduced team resources (e.g. around traditional holiday periods). Due to work demands they may have dates that they don't take sales calls visit or only have certain days of the weeks or time slots.

You will also have an opportunity to meet with distribution partners at trade shows, workshops and sales missions that you attend.

### What should I consider when planning a sales call & staff training?

- Consider your purpose and who you need to meet with. Always meet with the key product buyer/s to discuss rate contracts and provide updates on your products before training the reservations teams
- Is your product being sold as part of an itinerary? It is often good to conduct training with other complementary products to sell a destination
- How many staff will you be training?
- How much time do you have?
- Allow enough time between meetings for travel (and hiccups) and also for potentially longer meetings than initially planned

## What are the 'do's and 'don't's of sales calls and staff training?



### DO

- ✓ Make sure you have something new and interesting to discuss or feedback to give
- ✓ Make an appointment and turn up on time – be organised
- ✓ Reconfirm your appointment a few days prior
- ✓ Research the distributor before you call. What markets do they work in? Do they sell a competitor's product or product that is complementary to your own?
- ✓ Make sure you have a basic understanding of cultural differences and local customs even if they are based in England, i.e. if you are visiting an Asian distributor don't be afraid to take a small gift. Research cultural differences and respect them
- ✓ Be flexible – impress your distribution partner by offering to accommodate adjustments in product or booking procedures and offering incentives when necessary to secure their business
- ✓ If possible, provide your distributor with feedback, let them know how much business they have been producing for you
- ✓ Keep your presentation simple, factual and interesting. Include a simple overview of the products you provide using great images, focusing on your unique selling points (what makes your product different from your competitors) and the functional aspects of booking your product
- ✓ Take brochures and any additional relevant sales collateral
- ✓ Consider bringing in morning or afternoon tea
- ✓ Follow up and honour everything committed

In addition, consider creating webinars or pre-prepared content that sales teams can digest in their own time. As there are time pressures on many sales teams, this might be a way to get greater reach if they are able to do this in their own time.



### DON'T

- ✗ Visit during busy periods, when major trade shows are being conducted or during product planning
- ✗ Don't arrive unannounced – cold calling is almost never appreciated and likely to prove counter-productive
- ✗ Don't commit to rates or services without keeping a written record

## Who else should I contact for sales calls and staff training?

Apart from your distribution partners, always keep your local DMO updated. These organisations are also promoting your products and packages, providing opportunities for e-newsletter inclusions and joint marketing opportunities, and can provide updated information and contacts.

### What opportunities can networking offer?

There is often a range of social events held within the tourism industry that provide networking opportunities, which can further support your relationship building and product awareness. Networking can be undertaken at formal events, such as welcome and farewell functions at trade shows or at informal events.

However, don't wait for a trade show to network, as there are plenty of other opportunities. As a start, contact your local DMO who may have a listing of upcoming industry social events.

Even better, offer your venue or product as a networking location – not only will you get to meet industry professionals but you will get to showcase and provide a familiarisation on your product at the same time. People who are in the tourism industry tend to be very social and welcome the opportunity to meet each other.

### Understand the purpose of networking & set your goals

To make the most out of networking opportunities you need to understand your goals, such as getting to know people, asking questions, sharing information about your product, building new relationships and further developing existing relationships.

Quality is more important than quantity – don't focus on grabbing as many business cards as you can, rather, focus on building the best relationships you can. Also keep in mind that it's important for you to return the goodwill by giving referrals as well. Supporting and encouraging other businesses may facilitate referrals back to you and provide opportunities for synergies.

By having a pre-prepared list of the questions you want to ask, you will avoid awkward silences and ensure that you gain the information and outcomes related to your goals. Don't be too scripted, be natural, however be mentally prepared with some ideas for discussion. Focus on open-ended questions to ensure the continued flow of conversation.

### What further resources are available?

Refer to *Section 13 - How to get the most out of trade shows* for further information on how to conduct the perfect appointment and tips on how to follow up. This information also directly relates to sales calls and staff training and will assist in ensuring successful appointments.







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