

TRAVEL AGENTS FACE RACE TO BECOME MULTILINGUAL



Although English is widely recognised as the international business language, it has been found that customers with a native tongue that is not English are more likely to buy tourism related products if they are offered them in their own language. This discovery has prompted major tourist organisations, including hotel chains, to make their products multilingual. Big hotel chains and major airlines have begun producing multilingual websites. It is believed that when a customer is able to order something in his/her own language, then there is greater loyalty and brand awareness.

The Holiday Inn and Crown Plaza hotel chains have launched Portuguese, Korean and Arabic websites in the last 2 years. They are clearly not relying solely upon English. Although they believe that most customers will understand the English text, the emphasis has been to help the customers even more and add a touch of politeness and respect to their cultures with translations. Similarly, the luxury hotel operator, Ritz Carlton, has introduced sites in Japanese and Chinese for the same reasons.

Perhaps the most striking example of all is in Edinburgh, where bus tours are now offered in Mandarin and Russian. The Scots are trying to encourage the Chinese and Russians to feel more at home in Northern Europe. The Russians are thought to spend in excess of £100 per night and £700 per trip. These are not customers which Lothian buses can afford to lose. The Chinese, who come mainly to play golf, are thought to be just as important on a financial scale.

However, it is not all plain sailing in terms of translation. Some customers are still expected to have a basic knowledge of English as some logos and advertising slogans are still untranslatable. For example, it is impossible to translate the phrase 'it is my pleasure' into Japanese without their being a sexual undertone. Despite these rarities, the new multilingual approach of many companies has so far proved a success.

Date: 2007-02-27

Article link:

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