



Online training makes specialists out of agents without the jet lag. Aruna Rathod speaks to the industry veterans to examine its pros and cons

For travel agents in India, keeping up with new destinations is becoming increasingly challenging. With time at a premium, they find it increasingly difficult to attend workshops or even take time out for fam trips. As with many other aspects of the travel business, technology has enabled a solution—online training.

It helps boost the talent pool. The web-based specialist programmes and modules by tourism boards reach out to the industry, increasing awareness about destinations and boosting productivity of the travel industry.

Scores of savvy tourism boards have introduced online training modules. On the international scene, Australia, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Austria are actively promoting their online training certification programmes, regularly refreshing the content to keep the industry engaged. New Zealand, South Africa and Switzerland have recently introduced online courses. Great Britain and France have also begun using online training effectively to get good results

from India. "An online specialist programme helps agents to increase their productivity and efficiency when selling and booking destinations. It aims to arm the travel trade with the precise information about the product and the destination to meet the client's needs," says Rajji Rai, President, Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI).

INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

Tourism boards are allocating resources and investing in their online training modules. The South West Germany Tourism Board completely revamped its B2B Specialist Training Programme for the India market a couple of months ago. The programme titled 'South West Germany Cuckoo Training', which was earlier available at www.cuckoo-training.com, has migrated to a brand new online identity of www.going-cuckoo.com. Designed by the board, Cuckoo Training consists of 15 online training modules. On successful completion of the training, the travel agents are certified as specialists on the region.

Hector D'souza, India Head for South West Tourism Board, says, "This training



Singapore Tourism Board offers online certification



The Aussie Specialist programme is one of the most popular.

“Having a specialist logo not only improves one’s credibility within the industry, but also with clients.”

programme consists of interest and theme-based modules like wine and culture tours. Many tour operators specifically cater to these segments and we have designed the programme keeping that in mind. Currently 26 travel agents have registered with us for the training programme and they have given us a positive feedback that they are now finding it more convenient to promote South West Germany.”

With Indian outbound travel growing by the year, tourism boards are extending their footprint in India. Arjun Sharma, managing director, Le Passage to India, says, “With the Indian outbound industry posting healthy numbers, we are bound to see many more European destinations like Spain, Italy, Germany and France start online programmes for the fraternity in the near future.”

Seconding Sharma’s point of view, Ehtesham Peshimam, Sales Manager – India, Lama Tours adds, “We would also like to see the Far East, Dubai, South Africa and other countries introduce their online training modules for the benefit of the travel trade.”

THE DOMESTIC SCENE

The ones yet to catch on are various tourism boards in India. There is a huge need for specialised and specific information on the domestic front. And dedicated online training modules for domestic destinations could go a long way in bridging the information gap that exists.

Local tourism boards are slow in adapting to this concept. Subhash Verma, Vice-President, Association of Domestic Tour Operator of India (ADTOI) and Chairman, Travel Plus, says, “The Indian travel industry is in urgent need of online training mod-

ules which are almost non-existent. India has good training academies for the travel trade, especially for IATA courses, but little is being done to take the training online.”

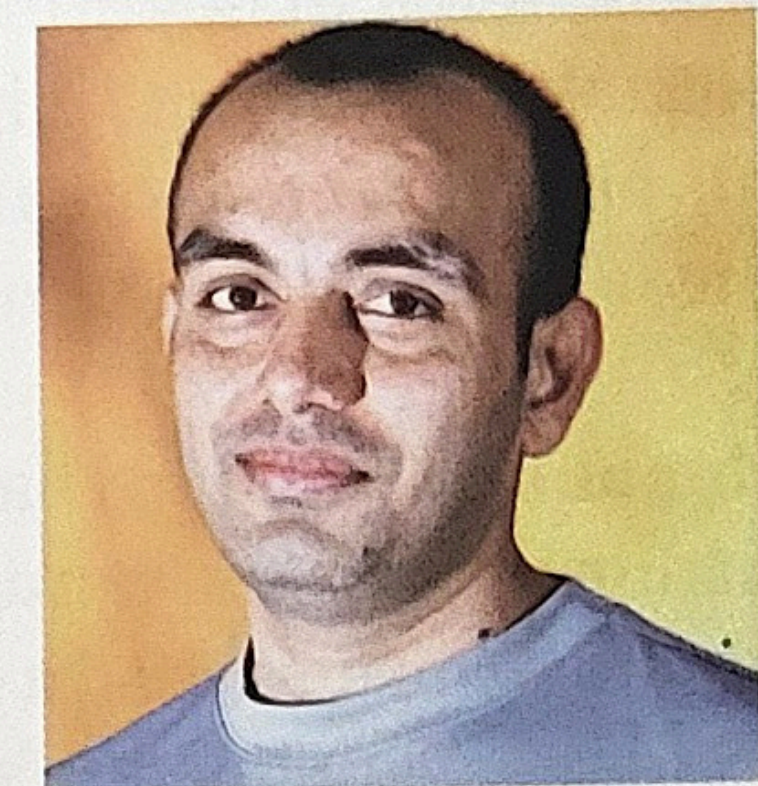
According to Verma, the trade academies should start online modules, and the state tourism boards should have their online training modules for domestic promotion in order to build state specialist human resources among existing travel and tour operators. “Travel trade associations like ADTOI, TAAI, IATO, FICCI and IITM should introduce online training and the Ministry of Tourism should promote and subsidise online training,” says Verma.

Some Indian states could hugely benefit with online promotional activity. Talha Rahman H M, Chairman, TAFI – Tamil Nadu Chapter, says, “Though we are currently lagging in this mode of promotion, there is an increasing awareness about online training and India will soon catch up. States such as Tamil Nadu are stepping up overall promotional activity to include online training right from the initial stages and emerge at par with other boards on this front.”

The North Eastern states that are becoming increasingly popular could use online training programmes very effectively. “Given their relatively inaccessible location, these states could hugely benefit with effective online training programmes,” says Vijay Thakur, President, Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO), adding that the online training tools will be a boon for the travel agents who in any case face a lot of difficulty in getting information about the destinations through the conventional channels.



Rajji Rai, President TAAI



Chetan Mota, Orbitz



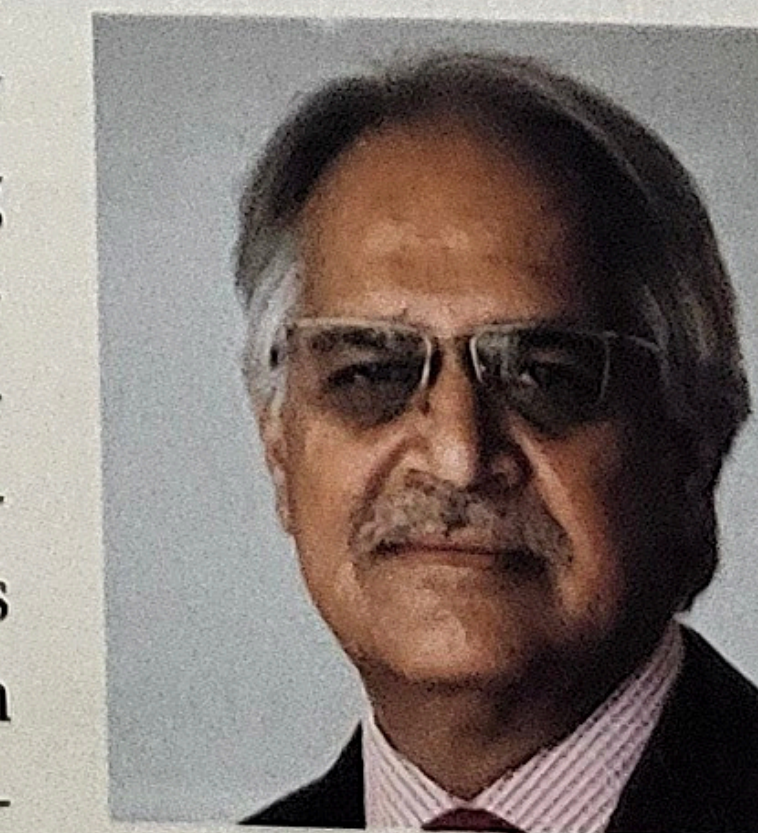
Dilshaad Buhariwala, Travel Optionz



Arjun Sharma, Le Passage



Talha Rahman, TAFI, TN



Vijay Thakur, IATO