

TIPS AND TOOLS

For affluent travelers, that which costs little is less valued. The affluent appreciate value so much that expense is usually not an issue as long as a product is not perceived as overpriced. Remember: perceived value is more important than price. Something that is overpriced will not appeal to the affluent. It does not meet their expectations.

Tip #3: Never offer more than two of anything to a prospect.

Affluent consumers appreciate options and the freedom to choose, but too many options will only confuse them. Limiting your recommendations to no more than two choices at a time has a dual benefit: Customers will understand your presentation far better, and they will find it easier to make

SUCCESS STORY: Making the Impossible Possible

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John Clifford, president of home-based International Travel Management.com in San Diego, set a lofty goal as a luxury travel specialist: to make the impossible possible. His strategy has paid off, earning him a position on *Travel & Leisure's* coveted A-List of all-star travel agents and a business that is on track to produce more than \$2 million in sales.

Realizing that his future was on the leisure side of the business, Clifford decided to part ways with his big corporate accounts and focus on nurturing affluent clients, one by one—and then delivering highly customized, unique vacations that suit each one's needs. To do so, he uses his strong networking skills and tenacious nature to develop contacts around the globe. If he doesn't know the person who can help, he makes phone calls and sends e-mails until he finds the person who can get things done.

By working his global contacts, Clifford has been able to fulfill "impossible" requests, such as getting

double upgrades at fully booked five-star hotels or securing tickets to Donatella Versace's sold-out fashion shows in Milan, Italy. Clifford believes it is his job not only to meet the demands of his affluent clients but also to open them up to the possibilities of new and inventive travel experiences. For instance, if a client asks to go to Mexico (again), Clifford might respond by saying, "Have you thought of Fiji? Or Belize? Or Costa Rica?" More times than not, Clifford says, clients take his advice and try something new. Rarely, if ever, have they been disappointed, he adds.

Clifford says that: "it is imperative for agents to offer riveting alternatives and suggestions," particularly to affluent clients who value enriching experiences. His combined strategy of making unique suggestions and delivering experiences that might otherwise seem impossible has allowed Clifford to survive and thrive in the competitive luxury travel environment.

Source: Adapted from Claudette Covey, "Getting on the A-List," *Travel Weekly*, October 2004.