



Case Study for Developing an Education and Self-Assessment Program for Members

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1. Overview

The ASTA Green Program was initiated in the summer of 2007 when the ASTA Research Department decided to write a green report to assist our members in understanding green travel concepts and terminology. As we began speaking with our members and our staff we realized we needed to take the concept a step forward and develop a guide to help our members communicate with clients and to help them assess travel suppliers. As we moved further down the path, we realized we also needed a continuing education component and the ASTA Green Program was born.

The ASTA Green Program is an education and self-assessment program for travel agents and travel suppliers. The core of the program is the Green Guide. The guide provides an overview of green travel as well as sections on terminology, marketing sustainable travel, and green resources. The guide has a large section on how to operate in a more sustainable manner and it includes a self-assessment tool for internal operations. For travel agents, there is a section on assessing suppliers' environmental policies when planning a sustainable trip for a client. For suppliers, there is a section on actions they can take to make their products more sustainable.

Those travel agent and supplier members who purchase the Green Guide can go a step further and become ASTA Green Members. To become a Green Member, they must read the guide, complete the self-assessment, sign-off on our Green Code of Ethics, and complete the application.

The advantage of the Green Membership is continuous education through a monthly e-newsletter and copies of Green Guide updates. We hope the enticement of continuous education in green travel will persuade members to follow-through on the self-assessment and set goals for reducing their usage of energy, water and other materials. Green Members can also use our ASTA Green logo to show their commitment to improving the sustainability of their operations and becoming educated on green travel options. Non-members may purchase the Green Guide, but cannot become an ASTA Green Member.

The program was formally launched on April 27, 2008.

2. Program Establishment

A cross-departmental team was established to develop the program. The team included members from our Membership, Marketing, Communications, IT, Accounting, Legal Affairs, Industry Affairs and Research Departments. The Research Director took on the role as Project Manager, since the majority of the work needed for the program would come from the Research Department. The team established a detailed timeline with actions broken out by department to ensure the program would be ready for launch.

As part of the research for the program, ASTA reviewed other programs including certification programs and education/news sources. We also interviewed Travel Agents that were considered “experts” in green and sustainable travel. Using the insights we gained from those sources we decided what information to include in the Green Guide.

3. Goals and Benchmarking

Our primary measurement for success is the percentage of members who follow through on the program and become ASTA Green Members. In the first year, ASTA’s goal is to get 5% of our membership to become Green Members. In the second year, we will continue to expand the Program and our goal will be to reach 10% saturation.

A major goal of the program is to publicize the program to both consumers and to the travel industry. We feel by publicizing the program to consumers through our consumer site, www.travelsense.org, and through press releases and articles ASTA members will see the benefits of becoming a Green Member.

As we grow the program and become more sophisticated as an industry we expect the program to evolve beyond sustainability to fully embrace all three components of social responsibility: environment, economics, and socio-cultural. Over time, materials will be added to the Green Guide to reflect that

expansion as well as to reflect changes in sustainable travel and business operations.

4. Outcomes and Environmental Benefit

Six months after our launch we have had about 3% of our agency members, 2% of our international agency members and 1% of our supplier members get the Green Guide. Our conversion rate from getting the Green Guide to becoming a Green Member remains low. We will be presenting a webinar on the Green Program and will continue to develop materials to show the advantages of following through and becoming a Green Member.

ASTA believes it is important for all travel agents to understand the basics about green business operations and how to promote and plan sustainable travel. As more consumers become environmentally-conscious, agents will be getting more questions about how to travel green and should be ready to answer them. We feel even if a small percentage of ASTA members convert their clients to traveling in a sustainable manner it will prevent a large amount of carbon production considering the amount of energy necessary for travel.

There is a movement that says all travel is inherently unsustainable, while we agree travel can be environmentally costly, ASTA believes that a well-planned, green trip can be socially and economically beneficial to the global community.

5. Relevance to Traveler or Travel Industry

The ASTA Green Program is very relevant to the travel industry considering travel agents account for over \$110 billion of travel booked.¹ Even a small shift in how travel is booked by agents to make it more sustainable can have a major impact.

6. Real-World Example

One of the first ASTA agency members who converted to Green Membership described the self-assessment process in the Green Guide to be very eye opening. She found that they could decrease her operation expense by making several environmentally-friendly changes including no longer using plastic wear and paper plates and decreasing how much paper they use. Her agents were also very excited to have the knowledge they needed to start discussing with their clients more sustainable ways to travel.

¹ PhoCusWright's 2008 The Travel Agent Distribution Landscape report

More information available here on the ASTA Green Program:

<http://www.asta.org/green>

<http://asta.files.cms-plus.com/pdf/ASTACorporateSocialResponsibility.pdf>