

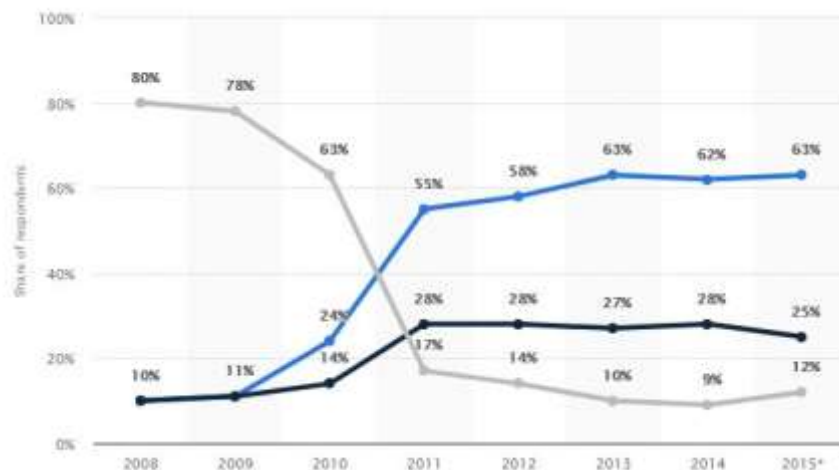


Is technology putting medical tourism facilitators in danger of extinction?

By Elizabeth Ziemba, JD, MPH, President, Medical Tourism Training

With the proliferation of apps and Internet-based resources, more people have access to the information that used to be the domain of facilitators. Other types of competitors put smaller medical travel coordinators companies at risk for becoming extinct. Will self-directed, knowledgeable consumers using technology kill the facilitation business?

Look at what happened to the travel agency business when Expedia, Orbitz, Travelocity, and other websites began offering the services that had been the traditional realm of travel agents. Savvy consumers starting booking their own flights, hotels, sightseeing tours, and other services. The travel agency business plummeted overnight. The graph showing the **change in travel agents' total sales from 2008 to 2015** paints a vivid picture of how hard the industry was hit by the Internet revolution.ⁱ



Facilitators are facing challenges from within the medical tourism sector. Technology has been harnessed by a handful of **Internet driven facilitation companies** that have made substantial inroads in dental and cosmetic tourism, like Dental Departures, to take that business away from smaller “mom and pop” companies. Many hospitals and clinics have their own international patient departments with marketing budgets that allow them to compete effectively in the global marketplace.

Where can facilitators turn to secure their businesses in this rapidly changing sector?

While it is clear that the travel agency industry suffered a substantial downturn, it is equally apparent that some travel agencies reinvented themselves to stay relevant and in business. Facilitators can learn from the **examples** set by those travel agencies that have **survived and thrived**.



Travel agencies that cater to **high income clients** continue to do well. Wealthy clients may have neither the time nor the inclination to engage in the research needed to organize the myriad of details required to organize health, wellness, or medical trips. This type of client will expect prompt, on demand, personalized service managed to the tiniest detail. Facilitators who can meet the exacting requirements and expectations of these highly sought after clients can serve those individuals whose wealth insulates them from recessions and other economic stresses.

Travel agents who focus on services for **niche clients** also succeed by being global resources for those individuals seeking a **distinctive experience**. For example, a New York based agency specializes in planning trips from scuba diving to sky diving for individuals with disabilities. These agents know the way to remove obstacles for people in wheelchairs or who have other mobility issues.

Facilitators can follow this example and **become expert** in certain diseases or procedures to distinguish themselves from competitors. Offering services tailored to the LGBT communities or individuals needing certain types of treatment such as cancer can demonstrate a thorough knowledge of the **distinctive requirements** that are invaluable to those clients. Identify customers who are being underserved and deliver a superior patient experience.

Technology is changing the world of medical travel and facilitators should prepare for the assault on their livelihood that is taking place now. Learn from the lessons of travel agents who have transformed themselves. Plan now to **reinvent your business**.

One way to **differentiate** your business while improving your knowledge, skills, and marketability is **certification**. [Temos accreditation in Medical Travel Coordination](#) is an affordable, streamlined process to demonstrate to your clients that your services are trustworthy, transparent, and of superior quality. No need to travel to complete the certification process, - just the commitment to excellence that will help you improve your services and promote your business.



Ready to get started? [Contact us today](#) for more information and to start the process of setting your business apart from the competition.

Medical Tourism Training offers medical tourism facilitators, agents and concierge services as well as members of international patient departments training, consulting and accreditation services to build competitive organizations focused on a superior patient experience and business growth.

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¹ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/478177/share-of-travel-agents-change-in-sales-us/>, accessed 24 December 2017