

**Notes from Tour Operator Forum at the 2017 SYTA Annual Conference
Monday, August 28, 2017**

***Forum facilitated by Tami Rogers, Vice President of Business Management Bob Rogers Travel
and Mike Grueninger, President Grueninger Music Tours.***

Note: All comments and suggestions were made from the Tour Operators that attended the forum and are not an actual endorsement by SYTA.

1) Topic: Airline challenges:

- a. Stricter payment and cancellation policies make it harder for student groups
- b. Certain states are mandating that you have a passport even if you fly domestically.
- c. Cancellations due to mechanical or storms
 - i. Who is liable to pay for lodging/meals if stranded or who is liable to pay for the trip that they can't reach?

Notes from the Forum:

- *You have more flexibility with using a 3rd party*
 - *More time to pay the deposits*
 - *Someone who can understand all the lingo in the contracts, especially with them continuing to change their contracts*
- *Always direct customer to TSA and airlines website so they are getting up-to-date information. We are responsible for educating the client.*
- *Require cancellation insurance for all flying groups*
- *Airline will pay for lodging/meals only when it's a mechanical issues*

2) Topic: Technology

- a. How do other companies use technology to increase productivity and efficiencies?
- b. Individual Billing
 - i. What products are people using?
 - ii. What problems do other companies face when having an electronic payment system?
- c. Websites
 - i. Best practices
 - ii. Affordable web builders?
 - iii. Discussion surrounding how we think electronic sales methods will ultimately change how everyone buys student travel.

Notes from the Forum:

- *Software packages are vital to creating efficiencies.*
- *CRM's used across the board*
- *HubSpot – some people using*
- *Need file sharing, Google Docs*
- *Custom-built payment systems work best*

- *Operators prefer vendors who allow them to pay electronically*
- *For online payments, parents can sign off on terms and conditions*
- *Parents calling the office now instead of calling the group leader – increase call volume*
- *PayPal, Apple Pay, online services (accepting credit cards) creates several concerns that have to be addressed*
 - *Credit card fees/increase in cost of package*
 - *Has to be non-refundable to protect price per person/proposals*
 - *Chargebacks have to be addressed/not allowed, has to be communicated.*

3) Topic: Dietary restrictions

- a. *How do you get the Directors to act on the request for dietary restrictions?*
- b. *How do you confirm that the managers at the restaurants will make good on the list of restrictions?*
- c. *What is the most efficient way for restaurants to locate the travelers with allergies so nobody gets sick?*

Notes from the Forum:

- *Responsibility is with the group leader to notify Tour Operator*
- *You must coordinate with group leader, restaurant and Tour Manager*
 - *Compile list for both Tour Manager and Restaurant*
- *Ask for information on medical forms*
- *Confirm with restaurant a few days before arrival*
- *Walk students up to restaurant manager*
- *When doing online registrations, collect dietary information*
- *Work with major restaurants to put together vegan, gluten-free items that we can share with our clients*

4) Topic: Transgender challenges for student travel

- a. *How do you handle transgender students on the rooming list?*
- b. *Do you have a policy in place on who confirms with all parties that everyone rooming with a transgender student is aware of the situation and that the parents are comfortable with it?*
- c. *Do we need to speak to our lawyers on the best way to move forward with this topic so we don't assume any lawsuits?*

Notes from the Forum:

- *Some schools pay for student to have a single room*
 - *There is some risk in having student in own room*
 - *Student could feel some isolation issues*
- *Schools take responsibility for rooms/speaking with all parents in room*
- *Always refer to school policy*
- *If group is flying, ID must match ticket for students who are 18 and up*

5) Topic: Challenges with suppliers/vendors (broad topic):

- a. Private security guards
 - i. How do you handle private security companies that mandate that 1 security guard/floor is required? More than likely, you don't find out how many floors you are on until the group checks in.
 - ii. Do you have a protocol in place with how the security guard interacts with the students/group leader?

Notes from the Forum:

- *Hire 1 guard/bus and that should cover number of floors group is on*

- b. Hotels
 - i. Challenges with being on multiple floors and hotels booking boys and girls room next door to one another
 - ii. Groups being bumped to another property
 - iii. Quad rooms: hotels booking students in a king bed and pullout sofa (not acceptable)

Notes from the Forum:

- *Need to qualify all vendors, get references*
- *Ask hotel to send room list with room #'s on it, prior to group arriving*
- *Add "no walk" clause in your contracts with the hotels*

- c. Supplier challenges (open discussion)

Notes from the Forum:

- *Hotels don't get back to Operators quick enough*
- *Restaurants that won't supply Operators with a contract*
- *Vendors that won't confirm until 60 days/out because they are waiting for better business*
- *Some theme parks don't confirm operating dates/hours until spring*