

How to Sell Festival Travel



Coachella

What It Is: One of the top music and cultural festivals in the U.S.

When: Two weekends: April 14, 15, 16 and April 21, 22, 23, 2017

Where: Empire Polo Club 81-800 Avenue 51 Indio, CA, 131 miles east of San Diego and 23 miles from the Palm Springs International Airport in the Indio/Palm desert area.

Why Go: Coachella is more than a top music festival; it is a mecca for celebrities, fashionistas, art, trends and more. This is a bucket-list adventure.

Top Tips

Getting There: Discover 7 Travel founder, Eric Grayson, advises clients to skip the frustrating traffic traveling into the festival. Instead, fly into Los Angeles, from where Surf Air provides private jet flights to Coachella Valley. The flight takes less than an hour and it provides a potential opportunity to spot a celebrity or two.

The Set Up: Coachella is broken into two separate weekends; festival-goers will need to buy separate tickets for each one. The weekends are set to be similar with the same lineup and same art experiences. Discover 7 Travel suggests that travelers looking for a more relaxed experience book weekend two. These three days are ideal for those who want to skip "the scene" and celebrity sightings. If your client wants the more lively experience with more people, book weekend one.

Where to Stay: Guests can camp onsite or book a hotel offsite. VIPs should consider booking a Safari Tent, which is an exclusive onsite luxury camping experience. The tent even has air conditioning and a concierge. The best part is that the price includes two Safari Guest passes. These passes, as Discover 7 explains, get travelers into exclusive Safari-Guest-Only bars and the backstage Artist Village. These private spots are the places to spot musicians and celebrities, explains Grayson. Clients looking to book a hotel, instead of one of the camping options, should be told that there are a limited number of hotels, and rooms fill up fast. To book hotel packages, visit www.valleymusictravel.com.

JANUARY 9, 2017

TravelAgent

UNITING BUYERS AND SELLERS THROUGH MULTIMEDIA INTELLIGENCE

www.travelagentcentral.com



2017 SURVIVAL GUIDE

Many challenges that agents had to deal with in 2016 are still lingering and some new ones are looming as the travel industry starts a new year. Here is what you need to know to overcome them and stay successful in 2017.

BY NATALIE MANEVAL AND JOE PIKE

FROM FEARS of terrorism to the continued growth of Airbnb, agents were faced with a number of obstacles to overcome in 2016. And whether it was concerns over the Zika virus or the impact of a Trump presidency, these challenges don't appear to be diminishing in the year ahead. In addressing such issues, *Travel Agent* and several of the industry's best advisors have come up with some solutions to deal with the toughest travel "curve balls" and knock them out of the park.

THE CHALLENGE: The Trump Effect

Love him or hate him, many can agree that President-elect Donald Trump has made some business relationships just a tad awkward for advisors specializing in Mexico and other international destinations that may have been put off by Trump's heavily America-centric platform.

Considering the various comments that have been made by the President Elect on minorities, do you – could you – still support Trump Hotels by selling them?

THE SOLUTION: Get to Know and Use These Mobile Tools

Here are some of the technology tools agents are using right now.

Eric Grayson, founder of Discover 7 in New York City, says his luxury travel agency partners with the AXUS Travel App, a preferred supplier of Virtuoso. About 1,700 agents are using the app. Grayson uses the mobile tool to help clients in a variety of ways.

“Our clients can see real-time changes to their itineraries, receive live flight alerts and can easily access vendor websites and GPS-based directions,” says Grayson. He adds that the app has helped his agency be more efficient and clients know they have the most up-to-date version of their itinerary, which alleviates a lot of the client’s worry.

“AXUS avails agents of the busy work surrounding proposal generation and itinerary preparation, so they can invest more time in relationship development and delivering superior customer service,” says Julia Douglas, founder and CEO of AXUS Travel App. “AXUS, very simply, allows agents to work smarter.”

Grayson says that when it comes to using apps, presentation can be the biggest challenge. It comes down to what the client needs as different travelers want their itinerary laid out in different ways. It’s the app updates that can present a problem, especially if the client was used to the previous format of the app.

“We’re vocal about any issues we have with an update. It may seem crazy, but these app companies rise and fall on their user experience, so they tend to be receptive,” says Grayson.

Andrea Malis, managing director of the Private Client at Camelback Odyssey Travel, hasn’t committed to using one specific app because she can’t find the right fit for both her and all her clients.

“We have experimented with a few different apps, but we try not to experiment on clients.” Instead, Malis is focusing more on the back-end technology that allows her to automate more of the work.

“With these back-end enhancements, I can focus more time one-on-one creating excitement for a trip in both traditional and new and exciting ways. I can be there by text or by WhatsApp, phone, etc. when my clients are traveling because I have less busy work,” says Malis.

Myste Wright, an agent with Protravel International, uses a range of apps, including AXUS, Umapped, TripScope and TripCase.

“As with anything developed by someone else, there is always some functionality or design you wish were just a bit different. For the most part, though, they are incredibly useful tools,” says Wright. As for VR, she doesn’t use the tool personally right now, but she says she has seen hotels and airlines using the tool.

“As the accessibility to relevant content grows I would definitely be interested in adding it as a sales and marketing tool,” says Wright. Another challenge with VR is that most of Wright’s transactions with her clients are done over the phone and e-mail, so using any such in-person tool would be difficult.

Grayson also sees this same challenge when it comes to VR.

“I think it really comes down to what our clients want. I think as the technology develops, we’ll have increased opportunities to share VR promos with our clients. However, our clientele probably does not want to leave their home or office to experience VR. We expect that we’ll begin doing a lot more of this when the technology is available as part of home entertainment systems,” says Grayson.

Malis doesn’t use VR either, but she does send clients video links that provide a 360-degree view of a room or property when possible. VR may not be in your agency yet, but more suppliers will probably use the tool and clients may follow.



Eric Grayson: “We’re vocal about any issues we have with an [app] update ... these app companies rise and fall on their user experience, so they tend to be receptive.”

NOVEMBER 7, 2016

Travel Agent

UNITING BUYERS AND SELLERS THROUGH MULTIMEDIA INTELLIGENCE

www.travelagentcentral.com

WINTER IN NEW YORK

SEE PAGE 20

INSIDE:

Europe's Art Scene

Africa: Wilderness Safaris

Onboard 'Seven Seas Explorer'

Driving Through Richmond, VA

SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT:

Hawaii Adventure Travel Focus

ON THE WEB

Amplify your knowledge, rewards and revenue. Check out the next revolution in travel education at travelagentuniversity.com

DISCOVER 7'S **Eric Grayson**

Adapting to the times is key to keeping and building high-end clientele.



Eric Grayson and his team at Discover 7 operate in a 24/7 style.

ONLY 27 YEARS OLD, Eric Grayson is running a luxury travel business — New York-based Discover 7 — that earned more than \$2 million in 2015 and is on pace to surpass that this year. Grayson's goal is to create vacations that are individually tailored; provide the highest service; and will leave a lasting effect on his clients much like the vacations he went on as a child (see sidebar).

He recently worked with a client on a vacation to Mount Everest. Prior to the trip, Grayson had his client consult a doctor to make sure they were able to perform all the tasks required. Once that was checked off, he suggested they meet with a personal trainer — an excursion to Everest can be extremely challenging physically and Grayson wanted to ensure that his client would be able to experience it to the fullest.

While finding all of the proper equipment and working with high-end suppliers to receive the best may have cost Grayson a fair amount of time,

providing his client with a gourmet culinary experience throughout the trip took the most effort.

"We [worked] overtime to nail down restaurants, private chefs and even a few home-cooked meals," he says. And all of this time spent was before the trip even began; plenty could still go awry, and therefore required the full attention of Grayson and his team.

"We need to be available to put out fires and resolve issues," Grayson says. "Because timing is so important, a seemingly small issue can throw everything off. It's really important to be attentive to all of that." This is exactly what Grayson lives for and has been striving for since his first taste of travel in his youth.

"Most kids worship athletes and movie stars but if you're obsessed with luxury travel," he shares, "you worship Isadore Sharp, the CEO of the Four Seasons."

Being the self-professed "travel geek" that he was, Grayson received Four

Seasons stocks for his Bar Mitzvah gift as per his request. As a stockholder, he was able to attend the annual meeting the following spring and even had the chance to meet his idol Sharp.

A few years later — now 16 years old — Grayson started taking flying lessons. Grayson says flying is "something that gives [him] an immense amount of joy — it provides a true sense of peace." Taking to the skies on his own was the obvious next step for someone obsessed with travel, but pilot wouldn't become his title eventually.

In the following years, Grayson would hold positions in client services at the Four Seasons and Rosewood Hotels and Resorts. In his free time, he would help his family and friends plan their vacations — something he became adept at because of his childhood leisure activities. Grayson even founded a social networking company designed to match travelers across the globe based on their compatibilities.

Fast forward just a few more years and Grayson is finally the owner of Discover 7 — an agency that books unique, luxury experiences for high-end clients by adapting to the times. For instance, the company launched an app that consolidates their clients' itinerary and provides them with real-time flight status updates. They've combined the human side of booking with the tech side of staying connected throughout the journey. This has been a key to attracting Millennial clients.

"The Millennials we work with tend to be highly resourced," Grayson says. "I think what surprises us the most is how much those clients rely on us, sometimes even more than the older clients who have been using travel advisors all their lives ... Millennials tend to be less interested in devoting

time to research and planning, so they rely on us for the next step. We're their app when it comes to travel." Millennials currently represent 35 percent of Discover 7's clients, but that number has continued to grow each year.

Discover 7 was one of the first customers of the Axis Travel App and requested so many features that Axis eventually updated the entire app to make those features standard. The ability to stay connected with Discover 7 makes vacationing — specifically during travel and connections — significantly easier and more relaxing for clients. Another way Grayson and his team are trailblazing in the travel industry is through their 24/7 style of operation.

"We do not have business hours," he says. "We don't restrict how often or through what means clients can contact us. All of my clients have my personal cell number and — believe me — they call on it whenever they want."

While many agencies are closing their brick-and-mortar offices and moving into their homes, Discover 7 still has its own office location. Grayson notes, however, that many of his clients lead very busy lives which doesn't always allow them to stop in during the usual 9 a.m.-to-5 p.m. business hours. This results in majority of Discover 7's clients booking their trips with Grayson or his other advisors either on the phone or through e-mail.

Grayson, nevertheless, makes an effort to grab breakfast or lunch with his clients once a month, whenever they're available, to keep up to date with any travel desires they may have.

Discover 7's app and Grayson's always-available cellphone certainly put clients at ease when they're abroad. On the other hand, if clients would like to know more about a destination prior to booking, Grayson can put them in contact with one of his "Local Footsteps," a group of guides in over 30 countries who keep Grayson and his clients in the know when it comes to an area he or his agents may be less familiar with.

Moving forward, Grayson plans to

“Millennials tend to be less interested in devoting time to research and planning. We're their app when it comes to travel.”

—ERIC GRAYSON

take Discover 7 further into the realm of elite luxury travel. His company already has a partnership with Morton's, a private member's club in London, which provides his clients with special access and even offers a baggage transport program that collects the clients' luggage at the airport and delivers it to their house or hotel. Soon they will have a paid tier that will offer additional amenities such as complimentary personal training sessions, surf lessons and cooking classes.

"I noticed there was a gap in the industry," Grayson says. "A lot of people have been doing it for a long time and were used to doing it in an era when travel agents were more of a necessary item rather than a luxury item."

Because Discover 7's forte is the quality of service they offer, he hasn't found it difficult selling to either Millennials or

Baby Boomers, who might have trouble trusting someone much younger than them to plan their vacation.

The result of their service is the way Discover 7 stays in business.

Although the medium of planning vacations may vary (walk-ins, over the phone, or via e-mail), Grayson says almost all of his clients discover him by word-of-mouth. When a company offers a "What can we find you that no one else knows about?" motto, people tend to talk about it.

As of now, all of Discover 7's agents are "generalists," as Grayson puts it — they're all comfortable selling any destination to a client as long as they know it's worth the visit. Although, he believes, with the growth of Discover 7 his clients — both current and future — will move toward specialization.

Unfortunately, the hectic lifestyle of a travel agent doesn't allow for Grayson to enjoy some of the leisure activities he likes; notably, he doesn't get to fly himself very often anymore. Although he's not in the cockpit when he's on commercial flights, Grayson says he still gets the euphoric feeling he experienced as a 16-year-old taking to the skies for the first time.

Perhaps Eric Grayson, the travel agency owner, was a better result than Eric Grayson, the pilot, anyway.

—MATT TURNER

Inspired Since Childhood

FOR ERIC GRAYSON, it's all about what brings him back to his childhood. From a young age the native New Yorker had the opportunity to travel to far-off places like Morocco, Botswana and Chile with his family. Grayson's father owned a brokerage specializing in emerging markets and thus traveled often. It wasn't just a work requirement, but also a big hobby for his father.

On those trips, Grayson realized the world is far more expansive than just New York — or even the United States. Traveling as a child was "infectious enough" that it inspired him to make it his career.

"I'd spend significant amount of my free time researching new hotels, destinations and adventures," he says of his youth. In the time since then, Grayson has held several jobs in the travel industry, which have led him to his current position as the owner of Discover 7.

Profile: Eric Grayson, A Childhood Obsession-Turned-Reality

For **Eric Grayson**, it's all about what brings him back to his childhood.

From a young age the native New Yorker had the opportunity to travel to far-off places like **Morocco**, **Botswana**, and **Chile** with his family. Grayson's father owned a brokerage specializing in emerging markets and thus traveled often. It wasn't just a work requirement, however; it was also a big hobby of his father's.

On those trips Grayson realized the world is far more expansive than just **New York** – or even the **United States**. Traveling as a child was “infectious enough” that it inspired him to make it his career.

“I'd spend significant amounts of my free time researching new hotels, destinations, and adventures,” he said of his youth.

In the time since then, Grayson has held several jobs in the travel industry, which have led him to his current position – as the owner of **Discover 7**, a travel agency headquartered in New York.

At only 27 years old, he is running a luxury travel business that earned over \$2 million in 2015 and is on pace to surpass that in 2016. Grayson's goal is to create vacations that are individually tailored; provide the highest service; and will leave a lasting effect on his clients much like the vacations he went on as a child.

Recently he has worked with a client on a vacation to **Mount Everest**. Prior to the trip, Grayson had his client consult a doctor to make sure they were able to perform all the tasks required. Once that was checked off, he suggested they meet with a personal trainer – an excursion to Everest can be extremely physically challenging and Grayson wanted to ensure that his client would be able to experience it to the fullest.

While finding all of the proper equipment may have cost Grayson a fair amount of time (working with high-end suppliers to receive the best equipment possible), providing his client with a gourmet culinary experience throughout the trip took the most effort.

“We [worked] overtime to nail down restaurants, private chefs, and even a few home-cooked meals,” he says.

And all of this time spent was before the trip ever began; plenty could still go awry during the excursion, which requires Grayson and his team's full attention.

“We need to be available to put out fires and resolve issues,” Grayson said. “Because timing is so important, a seemingly small issue can throw everything off. It's really important to be attentive to all of that.”

Yet this is exactly what Grayson lives for – this is what he's been striving for since his first taste of travel in his youth.



“Most kids worship athletes and movie stars but if you’re obsessed with luxury travel,” he says, “you worship **Isadore Sharpe**, the CEO of the **Four Seasons**.”

Being the self-described “travel geek” he was, Grayson received Four Seasons stock for his Bar Mitzvah gift (per his request). As a stockholder, he was able to attend the annual meeting the following spring and even had the chance to meet his idol Sharpe.

A few years later – now 16 years old – Grayson started taking flying lessons. On flying, Grayson says it’s “something that gives [him] an immense amount of joy – it provides a true sense of peace.” Taking to the skies on his own was the obvious next step for someone obsessed with travel.

As we know, pilot wouldn’t become his title, however.

In the following years, Grayson would hold positions in client services at the Four Seasons and **Rosewood Hotels and Resorts**. In his free time, he would help his family and friends plan their vacations – something he became adept at from his childhood leisure activities. Grayson even founded a social networking company designed to match travelers across the globe based on their compatibilities.

Years after attending that stockholder meeting, Grayson was becoming more and more immersed in the travel industry – only he hadn’t yet found his calling. He was, however, narrowing down his dream job.

Fast forward just a few more years and Grayson is finally the owner of Discover 7, which officially opened in 2013. Withstanding the advent of countless DIY booking sites accommodating tech-savvy users, travel agencies remain a thriving industry. Despite the competitive field, Grayson plunged in and hasn’t looked back.

While all of the technological advancements haven’t sunk the travel industry, they have changed how the industry functions. No longer are agencies used strictly to purchase airline flights and book hotel rooms; now they create itineraries for their guests, providing them with a taste of the local life if they wish.

Even **Millennials**, who would seemingly benefit most from online booking, are using travel agencies. In fact, they’re spearheading the travel agency revolution.

Enter Discover 7: an agency that books unique, luxury experiences for high-end clients by adapting to the times. For instance, the company launched an app that consolidates their clients’ itinerary and provides them with real-time flight status updates. They’ve combined the human side of booking with the tech side of staying connected throughout the journey.

“The Millennials we work with tend to be highly resourced,” Grayson says. “I think what surprises us the most is how much those clients rely on us, sometimes even more than older clients who have been using travel advisors all their lives ... Millennials tend to be less interested in devoting time to research and planning, so they rely on us for the next step. We’re their app when it comes to travel.”

Millennials currently represent 35 percent of Discover 7’s clients but that number has continued to grow each year.

As for their travel app: Discover 7 was as one of the first customers of a company called **Axus Travel App**. They requested so many features that Axus Travel App eventually updated the entire app to make those features standard. The ability to stay connected with Discover 7 makes vacationing – and specifically during travel and connections – significantly easier and more relaxing for clients.

Another way Grayson and his team are trailblazing in the travel industry is their 24/7 style of operation.

"We do not have business hours," he says. "We don't restrict how often or through what means clients can contact us. All of my clients have my personal cell number and – believe me – they call it whenever they want."

While many agencies are closing their brick-and-mortar offices and moving into their homes, Discover 7 still has its own office location. Grayson noted, however, that many of his clients lead very busy lives which don't always allow for them to stop in during the usual 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. business hours. This results in the majority of Discover 7's clients booking their trips with Grayson or his other advisors either on the phone or through email.

Grayson, nevertheless, makes an effort to grab breakfast or lunch with his clients once a month (when they're available) to keep up to date with any travel desires they may have.

Discover 7's app and Grayson's always-available cellphone certainly put clients at ease when they're abroad. Prior to booking, on the other hand, if clients would like to know more about a destination, Grayson can put them in contact with one of his "**Local Footsteps**": a group of guides in over 30 countries who keep Grayson and his clients in the know when it comes to an area he or his agents may be less familiar with.

Moving forward, Grayson plans to take Discover 7 further into the realm of elite luxury travel. His company already has a partnership with **Morton's**, a private member's club in **London**, which provides his clients with special access, and even offers a baggage transport program, which collects the clients luggage at the airport and delivers it to their house or hotel. Soon they will have a paid tier which will offer additional amenities such as complimentary personal training sessions, surf lessons, and cooking classes.

"I noticed there was a gap in the industry," Grayson says. "A lot of people in this industry have been doing it for a long time and were used to doing it in an era when travel agents were more of a necessary item rather than a luxury item."

Because Discover 7's niche is the *quality* of service they offer and not strictly the *service* they offer, he hasn't found it difficult selling to either Millennials or **Baby Boomers**, who might have trouble trusting someone much younger than them to plan their vacation.

The result of their service is the way Discover 7 stays in business.

Although the medium of planning vacations may vary (walk-ins, over the phone, or via email), Grayson says almost all of his clients discover him by word-of-mouth. When a company offers a "What can we find you that no one else knows about?" motto, people tend to talk about it.

As of now, all of Discover 7's agents are "generalists," as Grayson put it – they're all comfortable selling any destination to a client (as long as they know it's worth the visit). Although, he believes with the growth of Discover 7 his clients – both current and future – will move towards specialization.

This is only the beginning of a childhood dream recognized for Grayson. Unfortunately, however, the hectic lifestyle of a travel agent doesn't allow for Grayson to enjoy some of the leisure activities he enjoys: notably, he doesn't get to fly himself very often anymore. Although he's not in the cockpit, when he's on commercial flights Grayson said he still gets the euphoric feeling he experienced at a 16-year-old taking to the skies for the first time.

Perhaps Eric Grayson, travel agency owner was a better result than Eric Grayson, pilot anyway.

In this instance he gets to help others travel and recognize their own dreams.

"Vacations are what everyone works for – they're the highlight of most peoples' year," Grayson says. "Making sure that their experience exceeds their already high expectations makes this line of work both very challenging and very rewarding."