



AUDORA BURG / JOURNAL

Carol Knoll, travel agent at National Travel in Sturgis, looks up a fare for a customer. Many travelers now bypass a travel agent to make their own reservations and arrangements on the Internet, but Knoll noted the expertise an agent offers. "Agents are doing the same thing as travelers, but I've also been trained to do it and I have knowledge of what to look at. Unless you know the system and how to maneuver in it, it makes it more difficult," Knoll said.

## TRAVEL FROM 16

situation — and the irate man who made that mistake.

"A man called me screaming, he was so upset," Knoll said. Her first step was to ask him to stop screaming and calm down so she could understand what he was saying.

The story emerged: he had spent "quite a few hours" working on booking a flight for his wife.

"It was \$458, I will never forget that number, but he booked it in the wrong name," Knoll said.

"Now what you can do to change this?" the man demanded.

"I tried to help," Knoll said, but even a travel agent couldn't save that mistake, she said, because after 9/11, the airlines no longer allowed name changes on tickets. No exceptions.

"That's life — we all make them (mistakes), we all have to pay for them," Knoll said. She got to call the man back and tell him the hard truth.

"The whole thing is, you pushed the button. You had the wrong name. There's nothing you can do," she said. But she could also tell him that for what it was worth, all was not lost: minus a \$100 change fee, he had a \$358 ticket — in his name — for future travel.

### Classic example: trips gone right

There are times when the book-it-yourself traveler not only nails the best possible bargain, he does know it.

Like the deal Sturgis resident Aaron Norris, 23, snagged in 2005 for the "annual pilgrimage" he and his sister, 27, make to Disney World ("We're both big kids," Norris said).

Norris' sister found their rock-bottom package price by scouring Disney fan sites and message boards for "inside information." \$500 per person included airfare, a hotel on the property, and all their meals.

Granted, they traveled during the heart of

hurricane season, not too long after Katrina devastated the South.

"Hurricane season there's nobody down there," Norris said, "and it was right after Katrina and everyone was freaking out."

But they were cool customers. While they were there, the weather was "no problem, it rained once or twice for 20 minutes," he said.

"We have yet to find another deal like that one," Norris noted.

Knoll and Wohlers said that customers can uncover good deals by themselves but that travel agents offer service beyond simply making reservations.

"Web sites don't care," Wohlers said.

"My major thing is keeping my clients happy and don't give them any bumps in the road," Knoll said. "That's the thing with the Internet. You can ask it a question, but it won't give you an answer."

In addition, human experience and knowledge come into play again, especially in knowing what elements a traveler needs to follow up on even with a confirmation in hand.

Knoll cautioned that unless travelers maintain a watchful eye on arrangements, especially those made somewhat in advance, they may not be aware of changes in things like a flight number, departure time, or complete schedule change.

"Most people think things won't change," Knoll said. "Airlines change flight numbers like water."

### Final boarding call

Knoll articulated three key questions travelers need to answer, whether they work through an agent or make their own arrangements: "What do you really want? How much do you want to spend? Can you be flexible enough to change?"

Wohlers urged caution and a dose of common sense.

"I would just tell people to be careful. I've been here forever, and I still get phone calls you've won a trip — there is no free lunch," Wohlers said. "Nothing is as good as it sounds, be careful what you're doing, be careful what you're buying — there's people here with other resources, use them. Use all the knowledge you can."

## Spam Fast Facts

- Spam is e-mail that is usually unwanted, commercial and sent by automated means.
- Not all commercial e-mail is spam; some recipients may have opted in to receive the marketer's e-mail.
- Spammers may engage in deliberate fraud to send out their messages. They often use false names, phone numbers and other contact information to set up "disposable" accounts.
- In June 2006, an estimated 55 billion e-mail spam were sent each day. This is an increase of 25 billion per day from June 2005.
- Large-scale spam began in 1994, when messages were sent to 6,000 newsgroups, reaching millions of people.
- In February 2007, 90 billion spam e-mails were sent each day.
- According to Steve Ballmer, Microsoft founder Bill Gates receives four million e-mails per year, most of them spam. Most of them are messages offering debt refinancing or get-rich quick schemes.
- The most common items advertised in spam messages are

- pornography site subscriptions, prescription drugs, sexual enhancement products, printer ink cartridges counterfeit brand name goods, counterfeit software mortgage offers, fake diplomas from nonexistent or non-accredited universities, and pump-and-dump penny stocks.
- Spam is growing exponentially, with no signs of abating.
- In the U.S., spam is legally permissible according to the CAN-SPAM Act of 2003, provided that it contains a truthful subject line and no false information in the technical headers of sender addresses.
- The CAN-SPAM Act requires that each spammer provide all recipients with the right to "opt out" (decline future e-mail from the same source). But opting out is considered unwise because it confirms to spammers that they have successfully accessed an active e-mail account and provides spammers with useful information on their targets.
- Methods for filtering and refusing spam include e-mail filtering based on the content of the e-mail, blackhole lists, greylisting, spamtraps and more.

Source: wikipedia.org

## TOGETHER FROM 15

design," Frost said. "No two customers are the same, no two Web sites are the same."

"I set up a bunch of rules for myself when I started in this business because I had worked in just sort of a cookie-cutter, mass production (setting)," Frost said. "I said that's not what I want to do."

The easiest and most enjoyable design jobs are those where the customer is serious and understands the quality of her work — "someone who trusts me and my opinion, someone who realizes they're paying me for my opinion and experience," she said.

The design process can be a delicate dance between designer and client. Inherent challenges crop up on both sides of the interaction: for the designer to put aside her own opinions to listen to what the client likes, but also helping clients understand there has to be a purpose for the Web site.

"People think they need to have one, sort of like having a business card or a logo."

She said a common mistake is a lack of focus or understanding of what the site's purpose is.

"I have to marry the (difference), because I might have this high-end idea for a Web site and they want something fun and simple, so I can't do my high-end and he wants Chuck E. Cheese."

On the other end, "Sometimes clients just have expensive tastes," Frost said. "They will describe a vision of their Web site and it's a \$10,000 site," but the style doesn't necessarily fit their business.

She said there can be incongruities between a company's Web site and their product: for example, that a high-tech, flash-based Web site used to sell books wouldn't "mesh."

### Jumping on the Web site train

Approximately 50 percent of her business is redesign of existing Web sites.

"Because so many people in the '90s jumped on the 'Web site train,' and over the course of the seven years, the ability of the Internet has changed so much. We now have high-speed, and their Web sites look outdated, it was a hindrance," Frost said.

She said some Web designers don't optimize for the Web or consider that the various time elements involved in loading flash elements or other intensive applications adds up and slows down a site.

Flash elements aside, in many cases, redesign is simply a matter of changing format and colors or fonts while retaining the previous text and pictures.

But again, it's a balance between stable and stale. "It's very important to be a living, breathing thing. Nothing is static. It's all dynamic. You need to have something that pulls people in repeatedly," she said.

Frost said it's getting more and more difficult to find a fresh, unique take, but there are certain classic principles that inform design, like having navigation buttons on the left side of the page or the logo in the upper left hand corner.

"It's to have instant recognition of where you are. It's design theory," she said, because people read left to right (in this culture), so the eye instinctively starts looking at the top left of a page.

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