

Hospitality and Tourism

Travel agents

by Keith Harding

Level: Intermediate (to Upper Intermediate)

Target age: 16+

Time needed: 90 minutes

Grammar / language objective: Advertising language, superlatives, positive

Materials: Preparation: magazine/newspaper adverts for holidays. Worksheet 1: *Services and slogans*. Worksheet 2: *The customer journey*.

1. Warm-up

- Before the lesson collect a few advertisements from magazines and newspapers for holidays and other travel services. You can find them in most glossy magazines and in the travel sections of Saturday and Sunday newspapers.
- Get students to look at the advertisements and say which ones they like, and why.

2. Travel agency services and advertising

- Establish the different services that a travel agency offers (e.g. package holidays, cruises, hotel bookings, flight-only bookings, foreign currency, car hire, advice on visa and passport applications, travel insurance). Get students to explain what each of these services is, so that you can check they understand them.
- Discuss the different ways of advertising these services, e.g.:
 - Word of mouth / personal recommendation
 - Brochure / leaflet / flyer
 - Magazine or newspaper advertisement
 - Poster in travel agency window
 - Internet
 - Radio or TV advert
 - Special offer / discount
- Ask about the advantages and disadvantages of each – and which service they are most suitable for.

3. Services and slogans

- Give out Worksheet 1 and get students to match the slogans to the particular travel service. They are all services and slogans that relate to travel agents.
- Ask the students to report back on the answers in class. The suggested matches are given below but of course it may be possible to argue a different match – so encourage disagreement and discussion.

- Get the students to discuss who the advertisements are aimed at and if they think they are effective.

Key: 1. c; 2. j; 3. k; 4. i; 5. a; 6. g; 7. l; 8 d; 9 h; 10. b; 11 f; 12 e.

4. Language follow-up

Superlatives (often used in advertising)

- Focus on the insurance slogan: *The cheapest option is not always the least expensive.*
- Get students to find other examples of superlatives in the slogans (*best, sexiest*).
- Demonstrate the rules for superlatives:
 - One-syllable adjectives: *-est*
 - Three-syllable adjectives: *the most / the least + adj*
 - Two-syllable adjectives ending in 'y': *sexiest* (or *happiest* if you prefer)
 - Other two-syllable adjectives: usually like three-syllable (e.g. *boring*) but not always [NB Beware of words like *unique* and *ideal*, which by definition cannot have a comparative or superlative.]
 - Irregular adjectives: e.g. *good to best, bad to worst*

Positive connotation

- Focus on the car hire slogan: *From compact to luxury: the choice is never boring.*
- *Compact* and *luxury* are both positive-sounding words. What would a more negative interpretation be? [*compact = small/tiny/cramped; luxury = expensive*]
- The following positive words are often used in promoting holiday destinations and travel services. Write them on the board. Get students to think of:
 - a. what they can collocate with (e.g. *luxury car / hotel*); and
 - b. the negative interpretation.

Alternatively you could give the negative 'match' in a separate jumbled list.

<i>intimate</i>	[<i>small</i>]
<i>lively</i>	[<i>noisy</i>]
<i>remote</i>	[<i>difficult to get to</i>]
<i>unspoilt</i>	[<i>nothing there</i>]
<i>relaxing</i>	[<i>boring</i>]
<i>popular</i>	[<i>crowded</i>]

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5. Customer service

- You are now going to move from one aspect of the travel agent's role (promotion and advertising) to a different aspect: customer service and quality assurance.

- Write on the board the following quotes (often used in tourism quality service training):

"The important thing is not just to meet expectations but to exceed them."

"Don't just satisfy the customers but delight them."

- Ask students if they agree with these statements – in tourism and hospitality in general.

- Discuss in general terms how a travel agent can delight the customer and exceed expectations.

6. The customer journey

- Explain the concept of 'the customer journey'. This idea is used a lot in quality assurance and quality management training. It involves breaking down every stage of the process in the delivery of a service (in this case booking a holiday with a travel agent) and analyzing what happens at each stage and how service levels can be maintained and improved.

- Draw a picture on the left of the board of a sad person dreaming of a holiday (a stick-man with a thought balloon of the sun will do). On the opposite side draw the same person returning home with a suitcase, smiling.

- Ask students to think about all the stages that happen in between, e.g. *phone up or visit the travel agent* (but: before that?), and what happens in detail in the travel agent's office?

- After they have thought in groups of three for a few minutes, give out Worksheet 2, which gives one possible version of the customer journey.

- Work through the questions on Worksheet 2. You may want to input some expressions and language used at each stage (as they will need this in the role-play that follows). For the discussion in question 3 (if there is enough time), one of the three students could act as note-taker and could then report back to the whole class.

7. Customer service role-play

Preparation

- Identify the stages in the customer journey where the travel agent is directly involved. These will probably be the following:

Customer ...

... makes an initial search (brochures, adverts, internet)

... contacts travel agent

... goes into travel agent office/shop

... explains what he/she is looking for

... listens to travel agent's suggestions

... discusses options with travel agent

... decides on holiday and books it

... goes through details of booking with travel agent

... is asked about extra services (insurance, car hire, etc.)

... leaves shop

... receives documentation (tickets, etc.)

Plus: after-sales service

- Get the students in their groups of three to choose one of the stages (or you can allocate). They should remember the points that were made earlier about how to exceed expectations and provide an extra level of quality service.

- In the groups, students should take on different roles:

A = the service provider (i.e. the travel agent)

B = the customer (they can be themselves or take on a different customer profile)

C = the quality controller or monitor (who will need to take notes about how effective A is)

The role-play

- The groups act out the stage they have chosen, with C making notes on how A is providing good quality service or how they can improve. They then chose a different stage and change roles. They do this three times in all so that each student gets a turn at each of the three roles.

- Depending on the level of the students you may need to input some language – e.g. asking polite questions. You should certainly remind them of the need to smile and be polite.

Evaluation

- At the end of the activity discuss in class how the students found it. Do they feel they delivered a good quality of service? Did they exceed expectations? What did they find difficult?

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Services and slogans

1. Match the advertising slogans with the services.

Slogans:

1. We build smiles.
2. The unique British holiday that the weather can't spoil
3. Don't leave home without it.
4. The world's sexiest hotel
5. Welcome to the end of the day.
6. From compact to luxury: the choice is never boring
7. 34 storeys – and all with happy endings
8. Where nature had all its best ideas
9. The cheapest option is not always the least expensive.
10. On footprint tours, the pleasure's yours.
11. The best surprise is no surprise.
12. You won't find cheaper – and commission-free

Services:

- a. hotel for business people
- b. walking tour
- c. hotel for families
- d. destination (Canada)
- e. foreign currency
- f. motel
- g. car hire
- h. travel insurance
- i. hotel for people in their 20s
- j. indoor holiday complex
- k. credit card
- l. city hotel

2. Who are the advertisements aimed at?

3. Are they effective?

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The customer journey

Below are the stages of the 'journey' that a customer goes through when they are choosing and booking a holiday.

Before holiday:

Customer ...

- ... decides he/she wants a holiday
- ... discusses with friends and family
- ... makes an initial search (brochures, adverts, internet)
- ... contacts travel agent
- ... goes into travel agent office/shop
- ... explains what he/she is looking for
- ... listens to travel agent's suggestions
- ... discusses options with travel agent
- ... decides on holiday and books it
- ... goes through details of booking with travel agent
- ... is asked about extra services (insurance, car hire, etc.)
- ... leaves office/shop
- ... receives documentation (tickets, etc.)
- ... travels to airport

After holiday:

Customer ...

- ... returns home
- ... is asked by travel agent if everything was all right (after-sales service)
- ... (much later) thinks about another holiday

1. Did you think of any other stages in the customer journey?
2. The travel agent (and the tour operator) has an important part to play in many of the stages. Are there any where they are not involved?
3. Work in groups of three. For each stage think about:
 - a. What are the minimum expectations that the customer has?
 - b. How can the travel agent exceed expectations and provide an extra level of quality service?