

Tips to Improve an Incentive Travel Program





Adare Manor | Adare, Ireland

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RE-THINK WHY

Re-Think Why

Let's start at the beginning; incentive travel programs are implemented to achieve business results.

Year after year, company goals shift and grow to support the changing needs of the organization. Companies adjust their go-to-market strategies, but what about their incentive program?

When was the last time you evaluated how today's corporate priorities (the "why") line up with the structure of your current incentive program?

Have you gathered your stakeholders in a conference room to consider the "why" of an incentive trip today versus the "why" from when you initially launched it? To get on the same page, ask yourselves:

- Do the qualifying rules reflect today's new realities?
- What new behaviors will drive success?
- New objectives such as net new logos, launch new products, or grow new verticals?
- Are there teams that help drive results and should be included in the program?

- Should the trip qualification period be a full fiscal year or a shorter promotion?

- Is there a need to add elements to support new objectives?

ex. A President's choice attendee from Marketing for outstanding lead generation campaigns, the IT Director that led the implementation of a new software release resulting in more renewals, or "Friend of Sales" nominees.

Tip:

It's vital to take a step back, consider what makes your program relevant, and gain a comprehensive understanding of what you need to achieve. Clarity is crucial.

THINK QUICK!

Off the top of your head and in one sentence:

What is the main purpose of your incentive trip?





FOCUS ON WHO

Villa Ephrussi de Rothschild | Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat, France

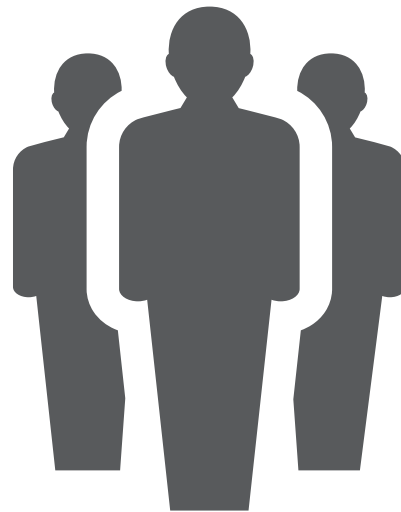


Focus on Who

In addition to goals shifting, companies frequently lose focus on the true target – the sales reps they are trying to motivate and reward. Lots of voices have opinions on destinations, hotels, activities, etc. – but we ask:

“Does the incentive experience surprise and delight the folks who are moving the needle?”

Re-consider your target audience – including their demographics and psychographics – to keenly focus your thoughts.



Demographics

- Gender
- Age
- Income
- Employee, channel partner, or customer
- Functional role, job title, and seniority level
- Geographic location of employees

Psychographics

- Current level of motivation
- Capability to improve, learn, or sell
- Level of travel savvy
- Lifestyle choices
- Attitudes, interests, opinions

Construct Your Personas

Here are some examples of what personas might look like, and how a persona may affect the way you think about your program design:

This is Abel, Abel is a sales rep for a tech start-up.

He's 33. He makes \$160,000 and doesn't own a suit. This is his first year with GoBig Tech, Inc. He won the President's Club trip; best job ever! His guest? His college roommate, no girl is going to tie him down in Mexico. You won't catch him reading a book at the pool; he's windsurfing today! Can't find him? He's at the swim up pool bar or playing beach volleyball.

Destination preference: All-inclusive resorts, preferably in Mexico or the Caribbean.

Abel wants some free time but also loves any type of high adrenaline activity. Don't waste your budget on \$300 centerpieces and unidentifiable hors d'oeuvres. Abel's good with a buffet. But throw in a great band at the after-party, and he couldn't be happier.

Gifting preference: Maui Jim Sunglasses.



This is Karen, Karen sells beauty products and lots of them!



She's 42. She makes \$60,000 and works from home (with the kids). She won Circle of Excellence for the last seven years and has been to every Caribbean island you can name. Her husband will join in, as they don't get much time alone together anymore. You can catch her at the spa, reading a book, or taking a nap. Karen never gets to dress up and go out, and looks forward to the gala!

Destination preference: Classic city such as Paris, Rome, Lisbon, or Quebec City with free time to explore a new destination with her husband.

Make sure there's a dance floor, because she and her girls are going to live it up at the award's ceremony. A spectacular venue and gorgeous décor will make them all feel special and appreciated.

Gifting preference: A local artisan shopping experience where she can pick something for herself, or maybe her kids back home.

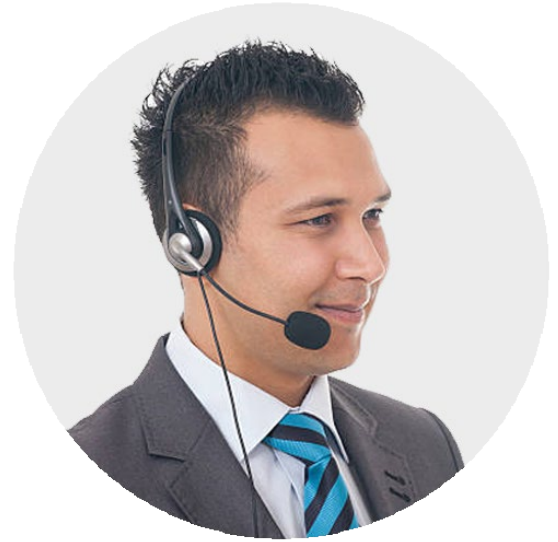
This is Paul, Paul is an Inside Sales Rep at a telecom call center.

He's 26. He makes \$35,000 and doesn't own a passport. After three years at Telco, Inc. he hopes to be a supervisor next year. He needs to sell 15 more premium TV channel subscriptions, and he's a trip winner! His girlfriend Stephanie will accompany him; she's a 3rd-grade teacher. Paul's looking forward to this nice trip which he'll use as an opportunity to ask Stephanie to marry him.

Destination preference: San Diego, San Francisco, or South Florida.

He's looking forward to a fancy hotel and looking like a rock star to Stephanie at the awards ceremony. Throw in a welcome gift and a day-pass for the local hop-on hop-off tour bus, and you will have Paul's loyalty (for at least another year).

Gifting preference: Couples massage or room credit for a nice dinner at the hotel.



Grand Velas Resort | Riviera Maya, Mexico





**IGNORE
“NOT WHO”**

Ignore “Not Who”

Sadly, it feels necessary to include a section here on who *should not* be the target audience when making a destination selection.

It's not about your CEO. Female CEO's prefer secluded spa destinations that offer days full of meditation and relaxation. But a male-dominated audience won't find that appealing. Likewise, many male CEO's are avid golfers, so the 4-handicapper thinks the most motivational destination would be Pebble Beach or the British Open. But, golf is on the decline with Millennials.

Motivating or Intimidating? Your VP's may love the 5-star brands of Four Seasons and Ritz-Carlton. But your group may live on 3-star budgets and feel uncomfortable with the fancy resort attire other guests are wearing, or \$50 breakfast buffets, \$30 cheeseburgers, and \$20 drinks.

Don't recreate vacations. Your Sales VP had an amazing vacation in the Turks and Caicos last year and wants to replicate the experience for 150 winners plus guests. Or your VP of HR hopped on the wrong train in Italy, ending up in La Spezia rather than Sorrento, and now he always asks for Italy.

As planners, it's a good practice to review how we are making destination recommendations. Everyone in your organization will have opinions and preferences.

Tip:

Step back, revisit your personas, put yourself in their shoes, and choose the destination that will motivate and reward them.

Grand Wailea Resort | Maui





BETTER COMMUNICATION

Fairmont Frontenac | Quebec City, Canada



Four Seasons Resort | Anguilla

Better Communication

Like any successful marketing program, your incentive trip needs a comprehensive communication strategy. From contest qualification to the pre-trip mailer, there's an art to the promotion of the program details, the qualifying rules that drive ROI results, and keeping your program top-of-mind.

Far too often, the communication strategy turns into a last-minute flurry of a few, unplanned emails.

In a world of email overwhelm, we are lucky if a small portion of our messages are opened and read. (Did you know email open rates average a mere 10% nowadays!)

Use a Theme

A clever, attractive theme can go a long way. Tie it to your program goals. Use the natural attraction of the travel destination and relevant/engaging design elements.

TIP FROM THE PROS

The #1 mistake today is having a tiny communication budget.

Don't let your incentive program become the best-kept secret!





Creative and Timely Messaging

Send a teaser prior to launch to hint of things to come and build excitement

Create a website and launch it when your trip is announced. Make it more than a registration site, keep driving qualifying participants to the website for trip updates and information

Distribute a kick off flyer to share high-level details and direct them to the website for more information. If your teams are together, plan a party with décor and themed snacks

Share regular newsletters for updates and to create engagement

Email monthly statements to update participants on their qualification status and highlight leader of the pack to create competition

Create kickoff kits using a custom box of collateral and giveaways that makes a thud sound when it lands on a desk. Kit ideas include: giveaways, brochures, selling aids, tip sheets, notebooks, pens, posters, window clings, etc.

Send theme pre-trip packets or wallet that includes all of their essential documents: contact information, luggage tags, etc.

Tip:

The main takeaway here is that preparation on the front end will create engaged participants and happy attendees on the back end.

TO BEACH OR NOT TO BEACH





Sistine Chapel | Rome, Italy

To Beach or Not to Beach...

We all have the best of intentions when it comes to choosing the perfect destination for the next trip. The unfortunate reality is that days are short, inboxes are full, and our natural tendency is to default to what has worked in the past, and let's be honest, that's usually a beach.

There is no one-size-fits-all incentive trip. Selecting a motivational destination is a mix of both art and science. The expertise of a good incentive travel company can be extremely beneficial.

They are the pros on destinations, flight options, and "incentive-quality" hotels. They've traveled to most places, seen resorts inside-and-out, vetted amazing activities, and built strong local partnerships. They know the hot-list of new openings and the properties with not-so-hot service.

Ask yourself:

- Are the voices of the "Not Whos" and other stakeholders coming through so loud that you struggle to ignore them?
- Are you basing destination options on ease of planning?
- Are you relying on existing partner relationships and not pushing yourself outside of your comfort zone?
- Are you thinking about where you personally would like to go next?
- Are you offering new destinations that expose attendees (think about repeat winners) to new experiences (beach vs. mountain, history vs. metropolitan, domestic vs. international, etc.)?

It's a lot to think about, but here's a good place to start. Take a look at the list below and make note of what is most important to your group. If you aren't sure, consider sending out a survey or asking around.

- International destination
- Cultural/authentic experiences
- Ways to get involved with the community
- Give-back element
- Edutainment
- Shopping
- Golf
- Spa
- Sports & Adventure
- Historical attractions

- Natural attractions and experiences
- Nightlife
- Onsite restaurant and bar options
- Offsite restaurant and bar options
- Unique offsite event venues
- Activities and entertainment within walking distance
- All-Inclusive
- Adults Only
- Family friendly
- Flight length
- Ground transfer time

Tip:

Change it up!

Most Popular Destinations

Caribbean
Continental U.S.
Mexico
Hawaii
Europe
Canada
Central America

Source: [Incentive Research Foundation](#)

Favorite Itineraries

Think outside of the box by thinking outside of the beach!

See our top picks & pictures.

[Our Favorite Itineraries](#)



Val-d'Isère Ski Resort | Val-d'Isère, France



AUTHENTIC IS IN





Hobbiton Movie Set Tour | New Zealand

Authentic is In

It's all the rage these days, accumulating experiences instead of things. It applies to everyday life and is just as relevant when it comes to incentive travel. Whether it's an individual or group activity, authentic, once-in-a-lifetime experiences are the stuff memories are made of. It's also what keeps your reps earning their way back each year.

The key to unlocking all your destination has to offer is partnering with the best DMC available. There are many, and they range from single individuals to

100-person operations. This is where the expertise of your incentive agency can help you shine because it's the job to vet them all and find you the best.

How can they help? They have their fingers on the pulse of the surrounding area and have contacts and ideas that we would never dream of.

Explore Personalization!

With the diversity of participants these days, it's challenging to cater to individual nuances and tastes. Consider offering activity categories like:



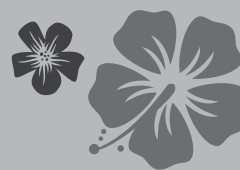
Adventure



Cultural



Historical



Creative



Wellness

Some authentic ideas to consider

Traditional festivals and events are great opportunities to immerse guests in culture – think the Caribbean Carnival, Aruba Kite Surfing competition or something as simple as a local food & wine festival.

Local culture can provide unique experiences: think rum tasting in Jamaica, grape stomping and making your own wine in Sonoma or, folklore and fairy tours in Ireland.

Local cuisine offers opportunities to visit working farms, tour production facilities like old sugar plantations, offer cooking classes using only local ingredients, or cocktail classes with local spirits. Some destinations offer guest the chance to dine with locals in their homes.

Offer a day with a local photographer taking attendees to the most Insta-worthy sights.

Local artisans are more than happy to show off their works and teach a class for your attendees.

You may also find that your property has an Activity or Recreation Director that can offer authentic activities. For example, Nevis has a local BBQ and party every Friday night in the parking lot of the local Water Company.

The Four Seasons Activity Director bused the night owls in our group to the Water Company, where they ate BBQ, drank the local beer, and danced with the locals into the night. That's about as authentic as it gets!

Tip:

Create a selection of activities that connect your guests to the local community and provide inspiring experiences that teach your guests about the destination, and hopefully a little about themselves in the process. It will take a little time and effort, but it will be well worth it!

Citroen Car Rally | Florence, Italy





GROUP EVENTS THAT “WOW”

Wine Cave Dinner | Napa Valley, California



Villa Centinale | Tuscany, Italy

Group Events that “WOW”

Each destination provides a unique canvas on which you can create group experiences that resonate with your attendees. If you are looking to make a lasting impression on your group, we recommend you look outside of the hotel ballroom.

Your incentive travel company and DMC will be your best partners for planning unique offsite events as well. Work with them to provide an event that your guests wouldn't be able to experience on their own trip. Here are some ideas to help:

Add an interactive element by inviting locals artisans to set up a market that allows your guests to shop onsite for authentic hand-made goods. Add a photo booth with props, or check out live events at picturemosaics.com. We've set up lawn games, sumo wrestling with blow up suits and Portuguese tile painting stations. Your partners can help you find a way to add engaging elements that fit the personality of your group.

Add some Edutainment to foster appreciation and connection, incorporate teaching into an entertainment element. For example, Copper Mountain, CO is located on Ute Indian ground; you can honor this heritage by opening your event with a blessing from Ute elders. Foreign dignitaries & government officials are a nice touch at a welcome reception.

Visit a local villa, castle, palace or spectacular home. Every destination has a host of beautiful properties lined up to welcome your guests. Some of them will even allow your hotel/resort to cater if food & beverage minimum is a concern. This “After the Harvest” party included three wineries onsite for tastings and grape stomping for the guests, at a Tuscan Villa in Florence.



The Bürgenstock Funicular | Lucerne, Switzerland

Embrace the resources of the destination – In Switzerland, serve champagne on the cable cars as you ascend the mountain. If you are in the West, have a buffet dinner at a working ranch with campfires and cowboys telling stories. Identify the top attractions and find a way to add the Wow!

Think of it this way; it's not a party or a gala, it's an experience. It doesn't have to be crazy or expensive; *it just has to be creative.*



The Resort at Paws Up | Montana, USA



**THE ART OF
GIFT GIVING**



The Art of Gift Giving

With all the hype around “experiential”, it’s no wonder the go-to gifting options are those that offer high-quality brand name choices, or the authentic treasures unique to the destination.

Popular gifting experiences include:

Maui Jim Sunglasses – many to choose from and an onsite “fit expert” to help find the perfect pair

Shoes from OluKai, sandals, custom Nikes, apparel, handbags & luggage, watches, blue jeans, cowboy hats and boots, custom jewelry, electronics, leather accessories, pajamas, and the list goes on and on.

Engaged Gifting: Get your attendees involved in the fun – dye your own sarongs, decorate straw hats or let us help create a floral market where your guests can craft an arrangement to enjoy in their rooms.

Have we mentioned authentic?

Destination-based gifts, all handcrafted by local artisans are great “pillow gifts”. Or set up an artisan’s market to give your guests the ultimate selection of authentic gifts, while allowing them to interact with the artisans themselves. Connection enhances the experience two-fold!





**HIRE AN
INCENTIVE PRO**



Hotel Savoy | Florence, Italy

Hire a Pro

Like your expertise in your industry, an incentive pro spends their days completely immersed in every aspect of the incentive travel industry.

They know the travel business inside and out. Their mission is simple: make your job easier and make you look great. They offer valuable expertise and management services that save you time and money.

Destination Expertise – from five-star resorts on pristine, white-sand beaches to grand lodges looking out onto snow-capped mountains, their knowledge can be endless.

End-to-End Management – of hotels, transportation, events, activities, participant

support and communications by CMPs (Certified Meeting Professionals) who do this all year long; they are faster, save you money, and reduce risks.

Global Partnerships – with high-quality vendors in numerous countries with insider information and discounted pricing.

Websites & Communications – to motivate participants to achieve more by creatively communicating with print, web, email, and apps and automating the winner's registration.

Budget Management – to make every penny count and keep your accounting department happy with full financial reconciliations.

"Is hiring an incentive travel agency more expensive?"

ZERO NET COST

**~15% agency fee
is offset by
~15% trip savings**

Bottom line...

Incentive travel is a unique business discipline. It's more than reserving a block of hotel rooms. Experienced planners have seen great trips — and not-so-great trips. They've seen similar projects in similar industries for similar situations. Best practices is an overused phrase today, but incentive companies truly offer best practice expertise.

Chances are you need fresh ideas, and as travel thought leaders, we are actively involved in incentive travel organizations, research groups, and trade shows, to stay abreast of the latest research, trends, and new ideas, to make your incentive trip the best it can be.

Do you have a group of 20 winners or more?

Give us a call! We want to make your job easy and make you look good.

Brightspot Incentives & Events | 972.661.6000 | info@brightspot.email



Conrad Bora Bora Nui | Bora Bora

