

Travel agents rebound as they adjust to tech-savvy consumer

By Richard N. Velotta, Las Vegas Sun

The Internet has become a game-changer for the travel industry. But it was also a job-killer.

As the public became more familiar with researching travel options and booking plane tickets and hotel rooms online, people became their own travel agents.

Thousands of travel agency professionals lost their jobs, and small mom-and-pop agencies either were absorbed by giant travel companies or disappeared.

But today, small, home-based travel agencies have rebounded. Last week, more than 1,500 of the estimated 8,000 agents nationwide were in Las Vegas for the Home-Based Travel Agent Forum, attending seminars and panel discussions to better themselves as travel professionals.

“It’s a \$100 billion industry today,” said Mark Murphy, president and CEO of Travalliance and a travel industry writer. “I don’t think people realize that 75 percent of cruises and tours and 60 percent of international travel are booked by travel agents who work from their homes.”

Melody Fee, vice president of the Outside Sales Support Network, which presents the travel agent forum – it debuted at the Venetian last year and is booked at the resort annually through 2016 – said that although some agents have struggled in the Internet era, many of those who have adapted are making six-figure salaries.

Murphy said the biggest challenge facing today’s home-based travel agents is marketing themselves. Most have thin

advertising budgets and have a hard time telling potential customers about the services they offer.

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