

READERS' LIVES

YOUR STORIES

THIS WEEK: MARIE ROWE
TRAVEL COUNSELLOR, TWYFORD,
BERKSHIRE



MARIE'S TIPS

TIP 1

Outline the key features in a quote, which highlights what isn't included in an online comparison, such as private car transfers.

TIP 2

Never turn down a social event; meeting people is key to getting new customers.

TIP 3

Use social media channels at a local level – content is key.

Marie Rowe decided to return to the travel industry 10 years after leaving her job as a high street agent. She has just set up her own franchise business after becoming one of the first agents to complete Travel Counsellors' Return To Travel programme

Q: Why have you returned to travel?

A: It was always in the back of my mind to set up my own business as a franchise owner. I have always had a passion for travel, but I thought I would set up on my own further in the future. I realised I wanted to do it sooner when I was on my honeymoon to Kalkan in Turkey last August. I did a lot of research into our own holiday and I used an agent to book it. I then spent most of our honeymoon working out if I could set up on my own sooner [than planned]. I was ready to leave my job; it was a high pressure job with clients all over the world. When I got back from my honeymoon, I researched every homeworking company. One of the most important things for me was back office support.

Q: What made you leave travel in the first place?

A: I was working at high street agency Go Easy Travel in Twyford. I started in a marketing role, but loved it so much I started selling holidays. They trained me and I became a honeymoon specialist. After two years I decided it wasn't going to plan; I had done a degree in graphic design and I wasn't doing what I was supposed to be doing. I spent the next 10 years pursuing a marketing career.

Q: What skills did you need to get back into the travel industry a decade later?

A: I didn't need a lesson in airport codes, but I did need to know which companies still existed in the industry and about Travel Counsellors' brand and ethos, and its bespoke technology systems. The Return to Travel course, which was tailored to ex-travel professionals, was what I needed. I was one of seven on the first course. The programme allowed me to reduce the time spent training at head office and focus on setting up

my own business. I did my first booking, for about £3,000, on the last day of my course. I did the course in February and started working in March this year.

Q: Do you regret not returning to the travel industry sooner?

A: I've no regrets. I progressed in a variety of industries and developed a phenomenal amount of skills that are highly beneficial to my position now. My experience in marketing is brilliant for what I do now: I can write blogs and use social media. Now I am doing it, I feel like I've been doing it forever. I feel 'free', and I want to work hard to be successful for me, not someone else.

Q: What have been the biggest challenges?

A: Learning how to respond to the changes in the industry and being able to confidently outline to customers the benefits of booking with me, including financial protection. It's been a challenge to learn how the industry has changed, with the rise of online companies and the decline in high street agencies. If anything has surprised me, it's hearing how many travel firms have gone bust.

Q: What's the best thing about being back in travel?

A: The best thing is how many customers you can make happy. You take the hassle away for people and we are supported to deliver that experience. I couldn't be happier. I get to look at pictures of paradise islands!

MARIE'S CV

2016 to date: Travel Counsellor,
Twyford, Berkshire

2014-15: global marketing director,
HANDD Business Solutions,
Pangbourne, Berkshire

2005-14: various customer marketing
roles in the property and retail sectors,
Berkshire

2004-05: Graphic designer and travel
consultant, GoEasy Travel, Twyford,
Berkshire

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