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TRAVEL NEWS WEEKLY

Sure goes global with new tech

HILKA BIRNS

SURE Travel is rolling out Sure Travel Connect, a new cloud-based booking platform that gives members access to global partners and customers.

Sure Travel already holds the SA rights to the market-specific technology solution and is now negotiating with its developer, Snowstorm Technologies of Canada, to expand it across Africa, says ceo, **Vanya Lessing**.

Sure Travel Connect underpins Sure Travel's 'Blue Ocean Strategy' launched two years ago, which saw the consortium looking for new opportunities and untapped market space, says Vanya.

Sure Holdings has performed well over the past nine years and is valued at R1,8bn-R2bn in terms of total sales. It paid out 8% more overrides last year to its members, despite difficult market conditions, she says.

However, the SA market was small and had experienced little growth because of the slow economy, with business moving from one consortium to another. "The travel sector is encountering the greatest period of change since airlines introduced the new remuneration model from standard commissions to incentive payments. Digital disruption, social media, the shared economy, and NDC are reshaping the industry.



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Vanya Lessing

Everybody has had to review their business model. We had deep concerns about the future of the Sure Travel Group, so we worked very hard to launch the Blue Ocean Strategy and having the Sure Travel Connect technology to underpin that."

The roll-out of Sure Travel Connect started with hotel bookings, followed by bookings of activities and cars/transfers. Discussions are under way with tour operators locally and globally, including Sure's preferred partners. Airfares and a corporate booking solution are to follow later this year.

Sure Travel Connect also includes a social media component.

Vanya says the booking platform has been developed specifically to benefit Sure Travel's diverse membership of owner-managed small, medium and large agents. "It's not costly, is easy to use, and brings in new customers. It's all about removing geographical barriers."

Other features include:

- Customisation and branding for the agent's business and for corporates, linked to their agency.
- The whole platform is an OTA, which means the Sure Travel agent can compare discounted rates on many online aggregators, e.g. Sure Travel Connect's own pricing versus Booking.com. "A soft launch with some of our members revealed that 95% of our quotes are 20-30% cheaper than those of the online aggregators; that's where we are finding new customers," Vanya explains.
- Each individual agency can set its own pricing margin.
- Everything on the platform is linked to agents' digital marketing activities.
- Customers can download the platform and do their own end-to-end bookings.
- There are TripAdvisor ratings on the platform.
- It is PCI and NDC compliant.
- It has a 24/7 support desk. ■