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**TRAVEL MARKETING
DECISIONS**
THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE ASSOCIATION OF TRAVEL MARKETING EXECUTIVES

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One of the precious few advantages of being older is having the experience and perspective to see that things swing back and forth like a pendulum, or rise and fall in cycles. Even recently, we've witnessed periods of exciting excess -- the dot.com boom and the late, lamented real estate rocket of the late '80s and the last decade, for example.

The current ferocious downturn has brought us back to earth with a jolt, and it's no fun at all. But at least our feet are on the ground once again, and things bear a closer relation to reality.

How will this turmoil and uncertainty affect the travel industry? Well, the first result is obvious: people will do less traveling for business and leisure than in the boom period. Many airlines, cruise lines, hotels, resorts and destinations have already reported a sharp drop in bookings. What we don't know is whether this will continue or whether things will calm down when the market rollercoaster ride calms down and we no longer need dramamine to watch the stock market reports.

Right now most people have lost a major portion of their wealth, and there's no way to know if it will take a season, a year or a decade to recoup that loss. For people under 45-50 this isn't too worrisome, but for those over 50 there is a great deal of concern because they don't have enough time to rebuild before retirement. And the baby boomers were one of the vital affluent groups that we all aspired to market to just a month or two ago.

Now people are regrouping, cocooning, nervously working on survival strategies. Virtually everyone I know is seeking ways to cut spending, live a little less large, within their means and without credit.

People will continue to travel, of course. Once things calm down a bit, they will be back on the move -- in part because we have done such a good job convincing them that travel is a necessity and a right, rather than a mere luxury.

But they will be looking at ways to do it for less. They will expect lower prices (just like home buyers in this market expect big reductions). Instead of demanding 5 star hotels, they'll step down to 3 and 4 star hotels. And they will be staying closer to home. Price and value will be the key to getting their business in this environment. This offers real opportunities to some marketers, but it's not good news for others.

ATME to the Rescue

ATME is dedicating itself to helping you react and respond optimally in this volatile environment. All our publications, the website and all 2009 events will address crucial issues: the best ways to market for less; technology that will help spread the good word for free; PR techniques that give the most bang for the buck; savvy new product development; effective niche marketing; which sectors to target, and more. ATME will help you form partnerships that will make a difference to your ROI. We will explore what other industries are doing not just to survive but thrive.

As always, you are at the heart of this effort. Please let us know what is working today for you and your team. We welcome your suggestions for programming, publications and events. Send all emails to Kristin Zern, Executive Director, kzern@atme.org or call my cell, 914 439-2047.

Yours truly,

Kristin Zern
Executive Director/Publisher
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