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Bringing Agents and B&Bs Together: BnB Finder's Mary White



Photo courtesy of BnB Finder

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Mary White, the founder and CEO of BnB Finder, wants to change that.

She's reaching out to agents with the message that many B&Bs and inns are anxious to work with agents and pay commissions. A travel agent page on BnB Finder.com contains information on which properties pay commissions.

There are about 3,000 properties listed on the site. "About 40 percent of our B&Bs and inns want to work

with travel agents," said White. The properties are located primarily in the U.S. but there are some in Canada and abroad. The web site also has pages of B&Bs that cater to business travel, family travel, traveling with pets, and gay and lesbian travel. White said a new re-designed site will be launched next month (January).

The B&Bs and inns that do work with agents pay an average off 10 percent, said White. Agents can search the site but then contact the innkeepers directly to book with a property.

“It’s the experience more than just a place to sleep,” White said of the appeal B&Bs and inns hold for guests. “They have personality. There’s nothing cookie-cutter about them; they’re one-offs.”

For agents, these kinds of accommodations represent “one-stop shopping,” White added. “Agents are dealing directly with the innkeeper; they’re the business owner. The innkeeper is on the ground.”

He or she is the local expert who can provide agents’ clients with the best advice and that special amenity on behalf of the agent, she said.

These accommodations are also “a tremendous value,” according to White. Breakfast is included, most offer free Wi-Fi, and beverages, fruit and cookies are usually put out for guests each afternoon.

B&Bs and inns haven’t historically worked with agents because “they thought they didn’t have the opportunity,” according to White. “Communication and connection is the biggest challenge for innkeepers.”

Alice Blair, owner of Newport, Rhode Island-based Continental Travel Agency, routinely books B&Bs. In fact through a personal connection with the owner of the Hydrangea House Inn, she located her business in an office inside the inn. She does about 90 percent leisure and 10 percent corporate business.

“I think there is a misconception about B&Bs among the general public,” said Blair. “Many think that there are still shared bathrooms and cold breakfasts. While these do exist, they are not on my radar.”

“Most guests who stay at B&Bs are upscale and well-traveled. They like a little luxury and they like to be pampered.”

Blair sees an advantage to booking B&Bs. “It can sometimes take a little work, but the result is usually a happy client and a nice commission and maybe even a B&B owner as a new friend.”