

AS SEEN ON



Independent, but not for long

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Independent agents and host agencies work best together when they choose each other wisely, according to Richard Klein, founder and president of ProTix Agent Support Network in New York.

Klein offered the following questions for independents and host agencies to keep in mind when seeking each other out:



Richard Klein.

Does the independent contractor have experience working out of the office and on commission?

"At different stages in their lives, some agents may prefer to be at home rather than working 9 to 5 in an office," Klein said.

Is the agent so independent that he or she won't be able to follow the agency's procedures?

"You can't only appeal to the way one agent operates, especially if you are trying to blend dozens of agents into one organization," he said.

Will the host agency offer coverage to an independent when he or she is traveling or otherwise unavailable?

Does the host agency offer fam trips to independents or keep them all for salaried staff?

Does the host agency offer strong financial backing and a solid track record?

"We recommend that agents check with the Better Business Bureau, ASTA and other unbiased sources of information," Klein said. "If there is a problem, you won't be the first to have one with the agency."

Does the agency have the latest technology behind it and does it use the Internet?

"Make sure the company stays on top of the latest technology instead of resting on its laurels, because [technology] is changing so fast," he said.

How extensive is the knowledge base of the host agency?

"If the independent agent has a question or concern, is there one main source to address those matters? The agency should be a clearing house of information and should be able to farm out questions to other agents in the network who have niche specialties," Klein said.

Will the host agency offer marketing consultation and support to the independent agent? If he or she wants to expand into a new area, such as cable TV, for example, will the agency be there to help?

If the agent wants to charge fees, will the host agency provide assistance?

Does the host agency route leads to the agents or are they on their own to create business?

Just the ticket

ProTix Agent Support Network, which was founded in 1982, is owned by Tix Travel in New York. The company originated as a ticket broker for sporting events and concerts, according to Richard Klein, founder and president of ProTix Agent Support Network, and eventually added the travel component for ticket buyers.

"Agents like to be able to offer clients tickets to sold-out concerts and theater shows, and we saw a tremendous niche evolving for us," Klein said.



With an eye toward expanding his sales force, Klein created ProTix, offering memberships to independents along with a dedicated program that revolves around them.

The company has had a Web site since 1996, and recently launched a new site, at www.protix.org, which offers relevant news, travel tools and a virtual membership tour for independent travel agents.

ProTix also offers Web sites to its members, which can be customized to individual specifications upon request as well as provide search engines.

The company affords marketing consultation for the life of the contract and farms out leads to member agents.

Other features include training on procedures, such as how to implement services fees and fee processing, along with offering a supply of form letters, scripts, vouchers and other relevant materials, Klein said.

The company still offers an in-house ticket brokerage for hard-to-get concert performances, Super Bowl tickets and other big-name events that can be procured on short notice, he said. For additional information on ProTix, call (800) 932-2849 or visit the Web site.