

## NEWS RELEASE

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### **New Study To Bring Together Travel Industry Thought Leaders On Tapping the Underserved Drive Market**

Washington, D.C. –AOL, Wyndham Hotel Group, AvisBudget Group, and the American Society of Travel Agents (ASTA) have joined forces with other organizations in the U.S. travel and tourism industry to develop unique research that focuses on U.S. travelers who drive rather than fly to their destinations. Project 85, named after the 85% of travel that takes place in the U.S. by car, motorcycle, RV or other vehicle, will focus on the “drive market” – which, according to the U.S. Travel Association, represents over three quarters of the \$495 billion in travel spending.

Project 85’s founder and strategist, Chicke Fitzgerald of Solutionz, a strategic consulting firm based in Tampa, FL., believes the time is right for research with this focus. “For nearly 30 years, the travel industry has been focused primarily on the air traveler, a once lucrative, but now commoditized market. The missed opportunity is substantial and better yet, is completely within reach. ”

The study, conducted by Mandala Research, a travel and tourism research firm based in Alexandria, VA., will focus on trip planning, technology used prior and during the trip, hotel preferences, dining habits, and other behaviors of these travelers. In addition, the study will have a unique industry component that includes the behavior of hotels, destinations, attractions, and travel agents to understand how industry is responding to the needs of the travelers on the road.

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"Many of our guests arrive by car, so it is imperative that we understand the value proposition we need to offer these customers," said Flo Lugli, Wyndham Hotel Group and one of the lead sponsors of the study.

Kaye Ceille, Senior Vice President of Global Travel and Partnership Sales at Avis Budget Group, added, "It is important to understand the motivations behind travelers who rent versus drive their own cars, who they drive with, where they travel, and why. "

The American Society of Travel Agents is also a lead sponsor, with Melissa Teates, Director of Research saying that it believes "the drive market can provide a revitalized source of opportunity for its member agents". Traditionally serving the air market and cruise travelers, travel agents could discover a range of needs they can provide to travelers who choose the American highways and byways.

These organizations are planning to use the data they uncover to expand their traditional definition of travel beyond the air traveler or the traditional vacation traveler to encompass what Fitzgerald has dubbed as "life travel". According to the U.S. Travel Association, out of the 1 billion overnight trips annually in the U.S., vacation travel represents just 8% of those trips.

Additional study sponsors include Experian Hitwise, WCities, Travel Guard and the Destination & Travel Foundation, a combined effort between the U.S. Travel Association and Destination Marketing Association International.

Experian's Hitwise brings an interesting dimension to the study, in that it will be contributing custom data and analytics about the search activity of the more than 10 million Americans interacting with over 1 million websites daily. The company's proprietary Mosaic™ segmentation will bring additional insights to the report.

"The drive market reaches every destination, large and small," says Jim Duda, Executive Director of the Destination & Travel Foundation. "Destination marketing professionals who have a greater understanding of this segment, particularly the technology and tools that influence decisions, will be better positioned to attract these visitors and service them while they are there." The mission of the Destination & Travel Foundation is to enhance the destination marketing and travel professions through research, education, visioning and development of resources and partnerships for those efforts.

A range of sponsorship opportunities is still available and for most levels, the benefits include adding questions to the survey and giving input on the survey's design. The study is being conducted in early December, with results available in February, 2011.

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