

# JAXFAX<sup>®</sup> Travel Marketing MAGAZINE

*The Travel Agents' Path to Profits*

## The Air Consolidator Guide

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# What Is An Airline Ticket Consolidator?

**C**onsolidators are not airlines, they are independent entrepreneurs, like travel agents, intent upon offering you (on behalf of your clients) domestic and especially international airline tickets on name-brand, as well as secondary class, IATA airlines at rates well below the posted tariff rates.

The air ticket consolidator makes it possible for travel agents to obtain reserved seats for their clients, add a specific serv-

ice charge or commission for you (the amount of the charge is not disclosed in the client's ticket) and still provide a round-trip airline ticket at lower cost than the client would pay by purchasing a regular ticket directly from the airline.

Most, but not all, air consolidators have contracts with at least one and usually a dozen or more IATA airlines. (Note: Charter flights are not involved in air consolidation.) Consolidators must use the ticketing and conditions of carriage rules of the specific airlines that they have contracts with. These are called prime consolidators.

Some air consolidators do not have contracts with any airlines. These consolidators—also legal—purchase airline tickets for resale to travel agents from prime consolidators.

All consolidators live by their reputation and are not specifically regulated by the U.S. or foreign governments or by IATA. Each airline makes its own decision whether or not to do business with any particular consolidator. It can be assumed that airlines set meaningful standards of performance and financial status when they appoint air consolidators. (The airlines want minimum negative exposure from consolidators.)

## Why Use a Consolidator?

Travel agents can utilize the expertise of air consolidators who compete openly against each other to provide quality air transportation on a wide range of airlines at prices highly competitive with tickets sold by the airlines or by "online" air ticket sellers—sellers who make little or no personal contact available to the travel agent.

Air ticket consolidators offer travel agents the choice of access to the consolidator's website or toll-free phone.

All consolidators sell tickets to travel agents in either net fare or commission categories. When purchasing a net fare, travel agents can add a service charge of their own selection. The amount of the charge is not identified in the passenger's ticket as such. If the ticket includes a commission for the agent, the amount of the commission also is not identified. Be sure that your service charge or commission (as appropriate) is always included when quoting the selling fare to your client!

By using air consolidators, travel agents have a convenient, legal way to provide lower fare international (and domestic) airline tickets to their clients.

## Choosing a Reliable Consolidator

Most travel agents have already chosen one or several air ticket consolidators who have earned the agent's confidence in recent or past transactions.

JAX FAX constantly monitors the general performance of the consolidators who list their flights and/or advertise in JAX FAX's monthly issues. Subscribing travel agents are encouraged to report poor performance and specific problems directly to JAX FAX. It is the ongoing goal of JAX FAX to maintain the highest level of credibility of its listers and advertisers.

When initially selecting or reviewing the choice of a consolidator, make sure that they meet your standards for business conduct.

1. Ask your fellow travel agents who they patronize.
2. Make sure your potential (and actual) consolidator provides several optional carriers to the areas most in demand by your clients.
3. Test them on reliability and keeping their word.
4. Ask them how many airlines they have contracts with (a measure of how they rank with major airlines).
5. Do they provide you with written copy of the airline rules and restrictions of the carrier you booked? (They should.)

Ask members of your office staff if they have had personal business experience with prospective consolidators. Continue to be alert after you select a consolidator to make certain that they do not lapse into poor service. As with any other business relationship, vigilance is the key to serving your clients with the best products at prices that maintain your clients' loyalty.

## 'Some Restrictions Apply' When Booking a Consolidator Ticket

As noted previously, all consolidators must operate under the rules of the airline on which your client will fly. Since all airlines have their own rules/regulations, each and every ticket may carry unique conditions.

Airlines change rules all too frequently, so be alert and insist that your consolidator informs you in writing (preferably at the time of booking) so that you can advise your client regarding penalties for flight changes, frequent flyer miles, refunds, etc. Make sure that your client accepts the rules and regulations before you pay for the ticket.

# JAXFAX

## TRAVEL MARKETING MAGAZINE

IS PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY:

**Jet Airtransport Exchange, Inc. (JAX)**

52 W Main St., Milford, CT 06460, 203-301-0255, F: 203-301-0250

**Audited Circulation**

**Douglas Cooke, CTC**

Publisher & Editorial Director, doug@jaxfax.com

**Randi White** | Randi@jaxfax.com

Vice President & Associate Publisher

**Jeff Posner** | Jeff@jaxfax.com

Associate Publishing Manager | Contributing Editor

**ART DEPARTMENT**

**Chantal Guillou-Brennan** | Cbjaxfax@aol.com

Art & Production Director, Webmaster

**EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT**

**Ryley Hartt** | Editor@jaxfax.com

Editor

**Katie Hultgren** | Katie@jaxfax.com

Editorial Assistant, Listings Manager

**Worldwide Correspondents**

Lillian Africano, Cruise Editor

Tom Bross: Central Europe

Mercedes Cardona: Central & South America

Marian Goldberg: Asia Pacific

Lisa Loverro: Africa & the Middle East

Susan McKee: USA/Canada

Melanie Reffes: Caribbean

**Contributing Editors**

Nina Africano, Jeff Burdick, Monique Burns,

Christopher Cooke, Phyllis Cocroft, Jad Davenport, Denise Dubé,

Katharine Dyson, Ben Frank, Patricia Earnest,

Chantal Guillou-Brennan, Patricia Harris, Danielle Hayes,

Ted Heck, Joan Jenkins, Mark Laiosa, Bob Levine, David Lyon,

Denise Mattia Merrie Murray, Barbara Radcliffe Rogers,

Stillman Rogers, Betty Rolston

**Clifton N. Cooke, CTC.** | Clif@jaxfax.com

Founding Publisher & Editor-at-Large

**Circulation & Subscriptions: 800-952-9329**

**Katie Hultgren** | circulation@jaxfax.com

Circulation Manager

**Marjorie Vincent** | Marjorie@jaxfax.com

Business Manager

**Advertising:** sales@jaxfax.com

Member of: ASTA—American Society of Travel Agents; ATA—Africa Travel Assoc.; NTA—National Tour Association; ATME—Association of Travel Marketing Executives; CHA—Caribbean Hotel Assoc.; CTO—Caribbean Tourism Organization; PATA—Pacific Asia Travel Assoc.; USTOA—United States Tour Operators Assoc. "JAX FAX Travel Marketing Magazine" (ISSN 0279-7984) is published monthly by Jet Airtransport Exchange Inc., 52 West Main Street, Milford, CT 06460. Periodicals postage paid at Milford, CT, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Please send address changes to JAX FAX Travel Marketing Magazine, 52 West Main St., Milford, CT 06460. COPYRIGHT 2010. All rights reserved. Printed in U.S.A. No part of this publication may be reproduced in print or electronically without permission. Direct requests for permission to the Publisher, JAX FAX, 52 West Main St., Milford, CT 06460 or via E-mail: Doug@jaxfax.com



## The Benefits Of Selling Consolidator Airfares

By Yale Norris President, Aussie Adventures

One of the number one questions I get when talking to agents at trade shows is “Why should I still sell air when there’s no benefit for me or my clients?”

With most airline’s commissions at zero when selling flights through their GDS, many agents believe they can’t make money selling air. This misconception has led many agents to stop selling air all together. Fortunately, this is just a myth and there are still great opportunities for agents to make significant profit on air sales and provide an excellent value for their customers. This is where a consolidator enters the picture.

Consolidators today have contracted access to both unpublished bulk net fares as well as commissions on published fares (including low cost short term initiative sale fares). This combination of fare options allows a consolidator to offer agents bulk net fares (no pricing on the ticket) or commission overrides on published fares, based on what will work best for the client.

When buying a bulk net fare from a consolidator, an agent can add their own markup to the ticket and still sell their clients a fare that is less than what they might find in the GDS or on the internet. In some cases these bulk fares can be hundreds (or thousands with business/first class) less than published fares. Some bulk tickets have slightly different change and cancellation penalties than published fares (a good consolidator will tell you these upfront), but a vast majority have

fare rules very similar to published fares. And many accrue frequent flyer points just as a standard fare would.

In recent months, many airlines have been offering very low cost, short term sale fares, which are in some cases lower than contracted bulk net fares. In these cases, a good consolidator can offer a hefty commission override on the fare, allowing you to stay competitive with the fares available directly from the carrier or over the internet while making a nice profit and keeping your client happy by providing full service for their travel needs.

### Your Partner to the South Pacific

Aussie Adventures has been consolidating fares to Australia, New Zealand & the islands of the South Pacific (Fiji, Tahiti, Cook Islands, Tonga, Samoa, etc) for 10 years. We have very strong relationships with our carrier partners and can offer great rates and service to match. As not all destinations in the South Pacific are serviced daily, we know the ins & outs of the flight schedules and required routings and can assist in planning the most complex itineraries. This planning assistance can sometimes save your client hundreds of dollars by ensuring the best routings are used to keep within the lowest cost fare rules. And we welcome all legitimate sellers of travel (new or experienced, home based or traditional brick & mortar, CLIA, TRUE, VTC, ARC, TIDS, etc).

So the next time a client calls you for an air-only booking, don’t send them to the web—call your consolidator. Chances are you’ll end up making more than you thought possible and your client will fly away a satisfied customer, ready to call you next time, knowing you can service all their travel needs.



## Net Profits With A Reliable Consolidator

By Akshay Shah, Vice President of Marketing for Sky Bird Travel & Tours; President of USACA

The year 2010 has just begun and we at the USACA are starting it off with a bang. Along with JAX FAX magazine, the leading travel marketing magazine in the industry, we are proud to announce some

great new things to travel agents.

So, what is the **USACA**? We are the **United States Air Consolidators Association**, an association dedicated to the travel industry. It is our mission to serve as the national trade association for those air consolidator businesses which provide their travel agent customers with integrity, trust and reliability. To meet that goal, all members of the USACA must transact at least \$20 million annually in air consolidation in conjunction with scheduled airlines; be incorporated in the United States for at least two years; and have never filed for bankruptcy or ceased operation.

We are proud to say that all current members of the USACA have been incorporated as consolidators for at least 10 years. Combined we have over 350 years in business as consolidators. So what does all of that mean for a travel agent?

To travel agents, our mission is simple: to work reliably and quickly so they can maximize revenue. We understand that travel

agents are busy. Especially in these difficult economic times, travel agents are working harder than ever. So the USACA makes it our mission to provide fast, reliable, trustworthy service, as well as high commissions and NET fares so that agents can achieve the highest possible revenue for their hard work.

There is a unique opportunity available to the travel agent when they work with a USACA member. There is no better way to get fast, friendly, economical service. Our undeniable experience enables us to know the industry and go to bat for our travel agent partners. Individually, each member of USACA consistently endeavors to deliver the best negotiated rates from the airlines for our travel agent partners. That’s what makes USACA a worthwhile organization for travel agents. And that’s what makes a difference to their bottom line.

This year we are looking ahead and seeing what new things we can do. We recently launched our new website, [www.usaca.com](http://www.usaca.com), along with a new free class at [www.tau-niv.com](http://www.tau-niv.com) detailing what consolidators do, how to earn high profits with consolidators, and how to choose a reputable consolidator.

We encourage you to visit [www.usaca.com](http://www.usaca.com) and see how a consolidator can make a difference and increase your revenue so you can work smarter, not harder.



## Choosing a Consolidator That is Right For You

*By Prem Cohly President and CEO Hariworld Travels - New York*

It is incredible to see how much the airline industry has changed over the last few years and the sheer wealth of opportunity available for travel agents to find the cheapest airfares for their clients.

Air consolidators enable agents to compare flight prices across a range of airlines by using their online booking engine. Agents can save time and money by comparing a range of airlines simultaneously and weighing options to determine the most cost effective, but also the most convenient time to travel.

### Find Better Rates, Faster

Consolidators generate huge volumes of sales on extremely low margins to a wide range of travel agents. By bringing together this group of travel agents we are able to provide the best airfares for thousands of travelers and thus negotiate better airfare rates than a single travel agent could negotiate. At the same time, we offer millions of fares to worldwide destinations and discounts in all classes of service.

Hariworld has invested time and money in developing a state of the art proprietary booking engine to eliminate tedious leg-

work in finding the cheapest and best prices with availability in a few seconds. A white label solution is also available for those agents who wish to target their own clients.

Choosing a consolidator that is right for you takes time and effort. Make sure you are dealing with a consolidator that has their own airline contracts, not a reseller. Their site should display the airlines they have contracts with. Find a consolidator that offers a website with substantial choice of fares and carriers to destinations you sell. Look for a consolidator that offers additional products to help expedite your searches with products such as cruises, tours, hotels, etc., creating a one-stop shop for you. Choose one with a user-friendly site that is easy to navigate and offers real availability, accuracy and booking management.

Your choice should be a member of the **Unites States of America Consolidator Association (USACA)**. The Organization maintains stringent standards and its members must stay in compliance to keep their good standing. Members are among the largest, most well-established air consolidators in the nation.

Your success is our success, Hariworld will help maximize your profits by offering your clients integrity, value and timely responses which are the key elements of successful selling and client retention. All travel professionals are invited to register and book at [www.hariworld.com](http://www.hariworld.com)



## Qantas Vacations – The Best Down Under

*By Michael Power, Director of Sales for Qantas Vacations*

With airfare discounting at an all time high in 2009, travel agent commissions have ultimately been affected. Agents have regularly come to us wondering

what the best deal was for their client and how to make a profit at the same time. As airlines suffered from the loss of the corporate traveler at the front end of the plane, volatility in airfare pricing became the norm. Prices in business class, first class and economy were reduced sometimes by up to 60% on international flights. Customers and agents alike became accustomed to not only searching for a deal but demanding it.

### Your Ticket to Better Fares

Although many of the effects from 2009 remain, the start of 2010 appears to have brought a slightly higher average fare in the long haul market. For the consumer this poses a problem, do they take a chance on waiting to purchase their ticket in the hope the fare will reduce or pay full fare up front? At the same time agents continue to be paid little to nothing when servicing clients on just an air ticket. Working with a reputable and experienced air consolidator is your ticket to cutting through the clutter and maximizing your profits. Due to the volume they are able to produce, a specialist consolidator has access to the most aggressive air-

fares in market. With the constant stream of promotional fares offered by the airlines with very short booking windows, a consolidator can help you lock in highly desired fares for your clients quite often at a considerably better fare than through a GDS.

Working with a consolidator, particularly a destination specialist can assist with any complicated itineraries that have multiple sectors, passengers traveling on different itineraries and multiple carriers. Not only will this save time but complicated itineraries allow you the potential to earn higher profits for your efforts. If you are not an expert in the destination you are selling to your client, why accept the burden of risk?

With a 30 year history, **Qantas Vacations** is one such specialist air consolidator and wholesaler to Australia, New Zealand, Fiji and Tahiti. Qantas Vacations has long standing partnerships with the major airlines servicing the South Pacific and close partnerships with the travel agent community. They offer agents access to any current sale fares available on **Qantas Airways, Air Pacific** and **Air Tahiti Nui**. Their dedicated air consolidator desk is staffed by destination specialists who have traveled many times to the destinations they service. A member of **USTOA**, Qantas Vacations guarantees quote turnaround time in less than 50 minutes or the ticketing fee is waived.

For more information on **Qantas Vacations** and to find up-to-date consolidator fares to Australia, New Zealand, Fiji and Tahiti call **888-892-6269** or visit [www.qantasvacations.com](http://www.qantasvacations.com).

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Address: 4751 Wilshire Blvd, Suite 201, Los Angeles CA 90010

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Address: 22313 Mack Avenue, St. Clair Shores, MI 48080

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Years in Business: 40 years

Commission Basis: Net

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Contact Person: Dianne Atchison

Address: 7616 LBJ Freeway, Suite 700, Dallas, TX 75251

Phone Reservations: 800-527-2589

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Fax: 972-386-3802

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Commission Basis: Net Fares/Commission on Published Fares

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Commission Basis: Varies

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Years in Business: 42 years

Commission Basis: NET Fares and Commissionable Published fares

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