



## TheYearAheadComment

ROD EATHER, CHAIRMAN, COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIAN TOUR OPERATORS

The old saying that states "If you continue to do what you've always done, you will continue to get what you've always got" no longer applies.

For some time many people have thought that the internet was the major threat to their wholesale travel business. New travel websites that cut out the middle man and undercut the agent were unregulated and could be based anywhere in the world, creating a whole new set of challenges.

And while we were still coming to terms with the internet, a new element hatched within the internet itself – social media.

The advent of Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube among others has not only changed the way we think and act, it has also changed the way and, in particular, the speed that we respond to what is happening around us.

While these forms of media may not change the way we did everything in the past, they will certainly affect how we do things in the future.

### It's time to move on, catch up and look at how we can utilise today's tools to our advantage

For some there is the additional challenge from the past that is still to be dealt with – the wait for the return of "the good old days" before 9/11, Ansett, Bali 1 and 2, SARS, tsunamis, bird flu, earthquakes and revolutions struck. For those people a double whammy awaits.

It is now time to move on, catch up and look to how we can utilise today's tools to our advantage. Otherwise, be prepared to step aside or be crushed by the new breed of savvy wholesalers with whom the future of our business lies.

A new advantage for Council of Australian Tour Operators (CATO) members in 2012 is the

opportunity to create closer ties with our colleagues in tourist offices. The demise of the Association of National Tourist Office Representatives (ANTOR) has meant the creation of the tourist office membership sector within CATO. Around a quarter of previous ANTOR members have already signed up with CATO and many more have shown interest.

There is huge benefit in having wholesaler and tourist office representatives meet on a regular basis, rather than the current individual, ad-hoc meetings that occur. We can look forward to more informed, concise and cooperative campaigns which

will be of enormous value to destinations, wholesalers, travel agents and, in particular, the travelling public.

In addition, having the tourist offices onboard will mean so much more in discussions with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) which is responsible for keeping the industry and travellers informed of events and situations that may affect travel to countries around the world.

Wholesalers often complain that DFAT travel advisory notices are not up to date, are ill-informed or are misleading which can make them very detrimental to business. With CATO and DFAT representatives now meeting on a regular basis, we are hopeful of a more balanced and accurate account of what is happening in the countries we and the tourist boards represent, while retaining traveller safety as the number one priority.

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