

The ABTA Plan: building confidence in travel

Year one review: October 2010-June 2011

Issued: July 2011

October 2010 saw the publication of the ABTA Plan, which introduced our vision – *to build confidence at the heart of travel* – and set a five year timeframe in which to realise this.

The Plan was introduced at a difficult time for the sector, the lingering effects of the global economic situation; the closure of UK airspace as a result of the volcanic ash cloud; increasing aviation taxes; a series of strikes; poor weather; rising fuel costs; changes in financial protection legislation both at home and in Europe and a weak pound made for a challenging landscape.

The Plan set out the delivery of the vision through a set of eight strategic drivers, each containing specific objectives that in ‘year one’ would provide a firm foundation for realisation of the vision.

This report looks at the progress made in delivery of the Plan in its first year, and records our achievements made against the objectives it set out.



Our vision

Our vision is to build confidence at the heart of travel – confidence for companies to trade and invest; confidence for customers to book; and confidence that the industry is building a sustainable future.

To realise this, the travel industry needs to:

- Build from a foundation of successful businesses
- Deliver quality products, at every price level
- Have confident customers
- Share the benefits of tourism to ensure destinations thrive
- Manage the issues of finite resources and environmental impact
- Be able to create economically and socially rewarding jobs
- Make a fair tax contribution both at home and in destinations
- Ensure that it is recognised for what it does, and the way in which it does it.

ABTA's position is at the centre of this, supporting our Members as they build their businesses, and acting as an emblem of quality and assurance for their customers.

Successful businesses

A review of financial protection was established in 2010-11 during which initial scoping work took place. The review set out to include the requirements both for our Members generally as well as ABTA as an organisation, and anticipate potential future risk. This was also sensitive to the changes proposed at the time by the UK Government around reform of the Air Travel Organisers License (ATOL).

The findings from consumer research highlighted some positive messages about the ABTA brand and these continued to be used in press and Member communications. Calendar specific PR activity surrounding events such as the Royal Wedding and Easter getaway also took place.

In improving online access to guidance a series of themed e-newsletters covering topics such as fraud, events and consumer affairs were launched. The former was part of a wider fraud communication programme which also saw ABTA participate in PROFIT and the City of London Police Travel Industry Tactical Group, helping towards our aim of becoming a leading authority in the industry.

Quality product

More effective relative regulatory guidance to our Members was provided through greater cross departmental working between our Legal Services and Public Affairs teams. This was widely communicated through our weekly 'ABTA Today' e-newsletter. Members' satisfaction remained high with the service provided, 91% identified themselves as being 'happy/ satisfied'. An exceptional operations protocol was developed to ensure effective guidance and advice in crisis situations.

We responded to both the UK Government Tourism Strategy and the Civil Aviation Authority Strategic Plan, as well as drafting our own aviation policy.

Confident customers

UK Government launched a consultation regarding the reform of the ATOL scheme with a view to implementing changes in January 2012, something we lobbied to be pushed back to later in the year. We actively lobbied both the UK Government and the EU on a number of fronts including Air Passenger Duty, the Tour Operators Margin Scheme, airline insolvency, air passenger rights, consumer protection and the Package Travel Directive. Whilst the latter was delayed until September 2012, regular meetings took place with ECTAA, and biannually with ABTA's German counterpart, DRV to support a consistent approach across Europe.

A new consumer claims handler, CEDR was appointed and a pre-arbitration disclosure process introduced. The volume of calls to our 0845 number increased, as did traffic to our website. Levels of Member and consumer satisfaction with the service received remained positive.

A board paper outlining ABTA's health and safety strategy was produced, with the marketing and roll out of the health and safety service was scheduled to take place in year two.

Thriving destinations

Joint membership initiatives focusing on sustainability were set up in Cyprus, the Dominican Republic, Egypt and Morocco. Our profile as an industry lead on sustainability in travel and tourism was raised through delivery at a number of key speaking opportunities which delivered consistent, frequent messages to the travel industry.

A survey of retail agents took place to underpin our retail engagement strategy. Research work also took place to identify and baseline potential indicators on the value of tourism.

Responsibility in a finite world

The Travelife Sustainability System continued to be rolled out and gained ground with major international tour operators and hotel chains.

A framework and series of indicators for monitoring sustainability were identified through work in partnership with the Travel Foundation.

Our position on a emissions trading strategy was outlined in the Air Passenger Duty paper produced for the Board, and included in the work around the 'Fair Tax on Flying' campaign.

We continued to work on establishing ourselves as a sustainability exemplar, and developed a series of in house objectives and measures. These were launched together with a series of awareness raising activities during a themed week for staff.

Rewarding jobs

A professional development steering group was established, and a paper on the potential for a skills academy produced and circulated. The Advanced Travel Professional (ATP) scheme was phased out and potential successors identified and investigated.

The management team worked on a number of in-house initiatives in response to the staff survey held earlier in the year. Work also took place on our 'tone of voice' and brand values, the outcomes for which were due to be rolled out in year two. Continual professional development work took place supported through cross departmental work through staff briefings and specific projects. External recognition was received as we were awarded 'one to watch' status in the Best Companies survey.

The ABTA Benevolent Fund was re-launched as 'ABTA Lifeline' at the 2010 Travel Convention and the Director of Development was integrated into the Communications Team.

Fair tax take

The ABTA manifesto was launched in June, and its priority demands communicated extensively in media coverage. Our position on the Tour Operator Margin Scheme was established, and we led a 'Fair Tax on Flying' coalition which was launched in March 2011 and received considerable media attention including over 1,300 'likes' on Facebook. The Government announced a freeze on levels of APD in the following budget which received further good consumer and trade PR.

Recognition

A political outreach programme was developed and meetings with MP and MEPs took place to promote our policy position(s), the latter being undertaken with the European Travel Agents and Tour Operators Association (ECTAA) which has included a series of events attended by key EU representatives for tourism and consumer protection.

Research found that our brand recognition remained strong, although the value attributed to it is under attack from a number of areas (such as financial protection).