



Travel Pulse  
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By: Claudette Covey  
Impressions: 110,000

## Travvy Awards Winners Spotlight: Brad & Van Anderson, Avoya Travel

CLAUDETTE COVEY | FEBRUARY 24, 2015



2015  
TRAVVY AWARD  
— WINNER —  
**Brad & Van Anderson, Avoya Travel**  
Most Innovative Host Travel Agency Leader

The Avoya Travel story really began 51 years ago, when Pal and Pat Anderson acquired a travel wholesaler that specialized in selling groups to Hawaii. Then, a decade later, the Andersons relocated from Hawaii to California, launching several brick-and-mortar agencies, which eventually included 10 locations in San Diego.

Along the way, the couple involved their sons, Brad and Van, now Avoya co-presidents, in the business. In the early 2000s, in an arguably prescient move, the brothers transitioned the business into America's Vacation Center, a host agency with several hundred independent affiliate agents selling travel.

"It was pretty obvious that the number of people going online to research their trips was growing exponentially, and we wanted to be there," said Brad Anderson. "Fewer people were going into their local brick-and-mortar agencies to pick up their airline tickets or brochures because they could do that online."

What they couldn't get online, the brothers realized, was expert advice – advice that cut through the millions of pages of travel-related content gleaned from search engines. "So the natural progression for us was to change from a brick-and-mortar to an online agency that provided the ability to connect prospects to specialists about the types of travel they were interested in."

Suffice it to say, the concept took off, and five years ago, Brad and Van changed the company's name to Avoya Travel, believing it would resonate on a more global basis. "Every year our independent agency network becomes larger and, more importantly, more profitable," he said. "The Avoya name doesn't limit us to any geographic area as to where we want to do business," said Brad.





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Key to the company's success is its Live Leads program, which develops leads that connect prospects to the company's independent contractors. "We're generating tens of thousands of live leads every month – and all of those go to our independent agents who are specialists," said Brad, adding that it enables agents to focus their efforts almost entirely on selling and customer service. "We give them the ability to really put their businesses on steroids."

Avoya also distinguishes itself from the competition with its staff of 150 full-time employees, none of whom sell travel. "All they do is support our network, seven days a week, 24 hours a day," said Anderson.

Its lucrative business model has clearly caught the eye of its suppliers. Last year it was named Royal Caribbean's Online Partner of the Year, and also received Celebrity Cruises' Chairman's Award. In 2012, Brad and Van were inducted into the CLIA Hall of Fame for Cruise and Sales Innovator, and the American Express Hall of Fame in 1999. The company has also received the American Express Excellence Award every year since 1997.

For all intents and purposes, the Avoya success story can be traced to more than a half a century ago, when Pal and Pat Anderson acquired that Hawaiian wholesaler. "I'll give the credit to my parents, who brought us up with an entrepreneurial spirit and to share and give back," Anderson said.

By example, Pal and Pat also played a considerable role in teaching Brad and Van how to capitalize on their individual yet distinct abilities. "Van has strengths that I don't have, and I have strengths that he doesn't have," Brad said, adding that the two have worked together since childhood on everything from newspaper routes to a business selling chocolate-covered bananas using bananas picked from their own backyard in Hawaii.

Although Avoya is a family-owned company – a third generation of Anderson offspring, Jeff, Mike and Bethany Anderson, hold senior level posts at the company – Anderson stressed the value that its staff and independent agents bring to the business equation. "A lot of the ideas for how we operate today have come from our employees and independent agency network," Anderson said. "They're all brilliant."

At Avoya, the concept of family clearly extends beyond blood relatives. "Our model is absolutely based on shared success," said Anderson. "You don't have to have the last name of Anderson to be one of our family members."

