

**A co-founder of one of the world's leading travel search engines has returned to using travel agents.**

Paul English co-founded the massive US-based travel search engine KAYAK with Steve Hafner about 20 years ago. Hafner was also involved in setting up Orbitz. The US-based Priceline Group acquired KAYAK in 2013 for almost USD 2 billion.

**English now feels that booking travel online entails frustrations which are removed by dealing with travel agents – real, human ones, rather than robots.**

“I tried to create the best travel website on the market,” he told the New York Times. “But as good as we thought our tech was, there were many times where I thought I did a better job for people on the phone than our site could do.”

Travel tech startups are not unusual, but the team behind Lola is making people sit up and take notice. Apart from English, other booking gurus and tech masterminds formerly associated with KAYAK are involved.

“A lot of companies pushed hard on the idea that technology will solve every problem, and that we shouldn't use humans,” English said.

“We think humans add value, so we're trying to design technology to facilitate the human-to-human connection.” Other travel executives confirm that consumers face “information overload”, being confronted by so much travel information online that they “research themselves into a circle”. This produces confusion, dismay and the desire to call a travel agent and ask for help.

Written by Peter Needham

---

## **Travel Agents: A Much Brighter Future Than You Might Think** *by James Shillinglaw /*

I've been covering the travel agency profession for nearly a quarter century now, for two different trade publication groups. .

First, a *Business Insider* report called travel agents a “relic of the past,” using numbers from a McKinsey study purportedly showing that the number of agents in the U.S. is just half of what it was 15 years ago. **The main challenge with this report, however, is that it was flat out wrong!**

**As my colleague Doug Gollan pointed out in his [article in Travel Market Report](#), the McKinsey study was based on faulty numbers that simply do not take into account the number of independent travel agents that have entered the market in the past 15 years. Indeed, the McKinsey study underestimates the size of the travel agent market by roughly 40%.**

- **It all racks up to yet another example of “journalism” based on very little reporting or exploration of the market. Indeed, that's what travel agents have endured for years, fighting a slew of articles forecasting the end of their profession, which is supposedly being vanquished by the Internet and online booking. The only problem is it just isn't true!**

In fact, independent contractors likely now make up the majority of all travel agents, bringing the true number of agents well above 100,000. And I'm not even counting the part-time agents who eventually may fully adopt the profession as their sole career.

At the same time, demand for travel-agency services seems to be growing across the board. MMGY's annual *Portrait of American Travelers* showed the use of agents has been growing for four consecutive years, even as the use of online travel agencies is falling, despite the billions of dollars the spend every year in marketing. In addition, recent surveys find more millennials would like to use the services of a professional travel agent, in contrast to the “common wisdom” predicting this digital generation would only book travel online.