

# AGENT@HOME

the business magazine for a new generation of travel professionals



the mobile agent  
HOW HOT NEW TECHNOLOGIES  
CAN MAKE YOUR BUSINESS BLOOM

## Cross Border Co-op

### Why joining an Ensemble member gives you access to a U.S.-Canadian powerhouse

Ensemble Travel Group, one of the oldest travel agency organizations in the U.S., began in 1968 as GIANTS, a cooperative of mostly New York-area travel agents. It stayed focused on serving a membership of mostly East Coast agents until the 1990s, when it branched out into Canada and got a new name. It also remains one of few agency cooperatives, meaning its members are actually its owners and share in the profits.

But something transformational has now happened to this venerable organization. Ensemble has new leadership and has become a truly cross-border travel agency group encompassing members from both the U.S. and Canada. At the beginning of this year it named Libby Rice and Lindsay Pearlman as co-presidents. Pearlman had served as president of Ensemble's Canadian operation for the past few years, but he now splits responsibilities for the entire group with Rice. For example, where Rice oversees technology and marketing, Pearlman focuses on supplier relations and membership.

Both Pearlman and Rice say Ensemble's new North American structure is working. "Our North American focus has allowed Ensemble Travel Group to reap benefits far beyond our expectations," Pearlman says. "Whether that's technology, best practices, business development, leveraging supplier relationships, creative thinking—it's been quite positive. We're encouraged by member feedback, as well. They like our sense of family, transparency, accessibility and thought leadership."

The new leadership team made its official debut last month at Ensemble's annual international conference at The Cosmopolitan in Las Vegas, Oct. 19-23, the group's largest meeting ever with more than 1,000 attendees. Ensemble also used the occasion to unveil a new air booking engine and a new cruise booking engine, two key tools to help its member agents get more commission and make bookings with great ease. The group also announced a number of additional partners, educational programs and amenities for its members.

According to Rice, the fact that

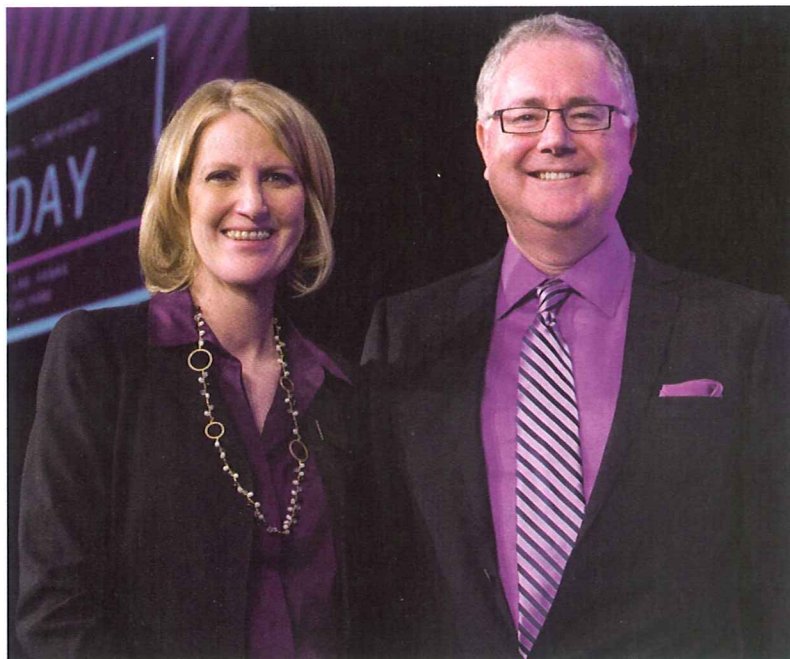
Ensemble has recently added 75 new U.S. and Canadian members further reinforces the fact that the group is making major strides on a number of fronts. While Ensemble officials admit some members have dropped out, they say they have seen a net gain in the number of agencies in the group. Ensemble members currently include more than 850 professional travel agencies in the U.S. and Canada. "Our very personal, consultative business approach and initiatives like the new air booking engine are creating a buzz in the agency community," says Rice.

While home-based travel agents can't join as individual members, they can affiliate with one of Ensemble's agencies to get access to the group's programs, benefits and suppliers. Indeed, Ensemble's membership includes a number of pure host agencies, such as Incentive Travel Connection, Montrose Travel's MTravel.com, Travel Planners International and Travel Network/Vacation Central. Here are some of the ways in which you can benefit from Ensembles' new programs, once you affiliate with one of these host agencies or another Ensemble member:

**Get more commission with a new air booking engine.** Ensemble says Air by Ensemble, the recently launched air booking engine for members in the U.S. and Canada, is significantly boosting revenues for its travel agency members. Indeed, some members are making \$2,000 or more on an air ticket on for some bookings on the 70 airlines offered in Ensemble's air program.

The Ensemble air booking engine was launched this summer with beta testing completed in September. The tool provides Ensemble's agencies with the ability to shop, book and earn commission on 70 airlines. The technology is free to all Ensemble agencies and is accessible through a link on [www.ensembleagent.com](http://www.ensembleagent.com), the group's eExtranet.

Ensemble's air program currently includes 70 airlines, 15 with



Ensemble's co-presidents, Libby Rice and Lindsay Pearlman, head up a truly North American travel agency organization.

preferred agreements, including its newest partner, Aeromexico. The organization also recently announced a new partnership with Blue Star Jets for the private jet needs of member agency customers.

**Use Ensemble's new cruise booking engine to boost sales.** At this year's conference, Ensemble unveiled a new cruise booking engine focused only on the group's preferred cruise suppliers. Powered by technology partner Passport Online, the new Tandem cruise booking platform is free to all Ensemble agencies in the U.S. and Canada and will be accessible on [www.ensembleagent.com](http://www.ensembleagent.com), the group's Extranet. Once beta testing is completed, the booking engine will be rolled out to U.S. members by the end of the year and to Canadian members by end of first quarter 2012.

"With this new B2B software, which houses everything in one convenient and familiar location, members can look forward to increased productivity and profitability," says Rice.

In addition to the major time savings, the technology provides members with the ability to search and book in real time Ensemble's preferred cruise partners, as well as the collection of Ensemble Hosted Cruises. Ensemble Experiences (specially created complimentary shore excursions) and Ensemble amenities also will be clearly displayed so member agencies can book their customers on them.

**Get access to a growing hosted cruise program.** Nearly every agency group these days offers special collections of cruises hosted by one of their members. These sailings feature added amenities and excursions just for customers of Ensemble member agencies. Ensemble Hosted Cruises, which has grown from 10 escorted sailings in 1998 to more than 350 departures today, has now added Oceania Cruises, its 14th preferred partner, as well as 10 new ports for Ensemble Experiences, the group's shore excursion program.

In addition, a new series of special culinary-focused cruises with Holland America Line will be featured in 2012, which will offer private cooking demonstrations on board, plus a specialty dining experience at Holland America's Pinnacle Grill. Ensemble Hosted Cruises also is adding to its Leaving Your Legacy Program, a series of enhanced Ensemble Experience shore excursions that allow members' clients to connect with local cultures and people of the area, as well as make a difference to the local destination. Ensemble also donates money on behalf of the guests to local schools, orphanages, and other places visited.

**Benefit from a growing hotel and resort collection.** Like other travel agency groups, Ensemble has dedicated a collection of nearly



Ensemble staged one of its largest conferences ever at The Cosmopolitan Las Vegas in October.

500 hotels and resorts that offer special amenities and services to customers of its member agencies. For 2012, the group has significantly boosted that collection with the addition of such high-end properties as Jumby Bay, A Rosewood Resort in Antigua; The Regent Phuket Cape Panwa in Thailand; 19 Orient-Express Hotels Ltd., including The Observatory Hotel in Sydney; among others. All Ensemble collection properties will be featured in the group's 2012 hotel and resort guide, due out in early 2012, as well as in an e-version of the property directory, launched earlier this year, which is continually updated.

**Learn how to better sell destination weddings and honeymoons.** There are a number of programs offering such education in the market today, but Ensemble has decided to help its members in the U.S. tap into the lucrative destination weddings and honeymoons market by launching a new specialist program. This comes a year after the group launched its own dedicated destination specialist program for the South Pacific.

The Ensemble Destination Weddings & Honeymoons Specialist Program includes integration with a series of related cruise, tour operator, resort and destination preferred partners; a complete Destination Weddings & Honeymoons website framed as part of the agency's consumer-facing Client Site; a lead-generation Destination Weddings & Honeymoons website, called "Destination Vows," which features destination and honeymoon content, tips and trends for weddings, and a specialist-only agency locator; print collateral, including a feature-rich magazine personalized for the agency's use at bridal shows and other venues.

**Get a dedicated concierge service with access to top events.** Also at its conference this year, Ensemble launched a new program called Ensemble Luxe Life, a concierge service dedicated to providing insider access and the best seats in the house for the world's top sporting, entertainment, and cultural events. Ensemble Luxe Life is a 24/7 service that delivers sold-out and premium seating to these events, as well as entrance to "A-List" parties and other exclusive activities.

**Get access to more preferred suppliers and destinations.** Ensemble has added a number of preferred suppliers and "On Location" receptive operators. For example, new suppliers include Central Holidays, the family-owned tour business offering customized FIT itineraries focused on Italy and the Mediterranean, among many others.

**Benefit from one of the top conferences in the business.** While attendance would need to be arranged through an Ensemble member host agency, Ensemble's international conference for 2012 will be held Oct. 24-28 in Las Vegas at Planet Hollywood's all-suite PH Towers Westgate. Las Vegas has been the site of the two most successful conferences, including this year's event. The nightly hotel rate for attendees is \$149 per night and special \$199 conference sign-up fee is good until March 31.

In the end, Ensemble is clearly an organization that is evolving into a trans-border group designed to weather the storms of both the U.S. and Canadian economies. For a group that is widely considered to be the original travel agency cooperative, it's an important transformation. @

*For more information on Ensemble and its members, call 800-442-6871 or visit [www.joinensemble.com](http://www.joinensemble.com).*