

# How to Effectively Market to Travel Agents on Global Distribution Systems

New research demonstrates ways for hoteliers and destinations to capture greater travel agent demand



## Introduction

2022 is the year of travel industry renewal, as worldwide hotel occupancy surged past 2019 levels (pre-pandemic) for the first time [beginning in the spring](#) according to Amadeus' [Demand360®](#) business intelligence data.

But it's not just leisure demand driving recovery. Amadeus [Agency360®](#) data shows hotel room nights booked on global distribution systems (GDSs) for corporate travel have increased significantly this year as well, rapidly closing the gap to pre-pandemic norms.

Will this level of demand hold steady through the fall and beyond? It's anyone's guess as the industry grapples with many challenges as a result of the pandemic. Now is the time for hoteliers and destination marketers to assess and optimize their strategies to better serve their key audiences, including travel agents.

Agents are a highly qualified audience that search on GDSs for the best deals for their customers. To become a favored option for travel agents and their clients, learn how to effectively market to them on GDSs with help from our latest research.



## About the survey

[MarketCast](#), a leading research and analytics provider, conducted a survey of over 1,000 travel agents to gain their feedback on the current GDS landscape.

The study sought to measure GDS usage and overall travel agent satisfaction as well as evaluate how travel agent awareness and perceptions of GDS advertising has changed since the pandemic began. Agents from 60+ countries responded to the online survey, which was shared collaboratively across the Amadeus, Sabre, and Travelport GDSs.

A similar survey was conducted in 2019 prior to COVID-19, hence the most recent survey results portray pandemic era shifts, updated points of view, and findings that address the travel industry's new "normal". This is the 10th time such a study has been conducted.

## Results

### Traveler preferences and habits are evolving

**Prior to COVID-19, travel agents ranked their clients' main items of concern in the following order:**

1. Price
2. Value
3. Health and safety
4. Cleanliness
5. On-site food and beverage
6. Environment

**Here's how their clients' rank these items now:**

1. Price
2. Health and safety
3. Value
4. Cleanliness
5. Environment
6. On-site food and beverage



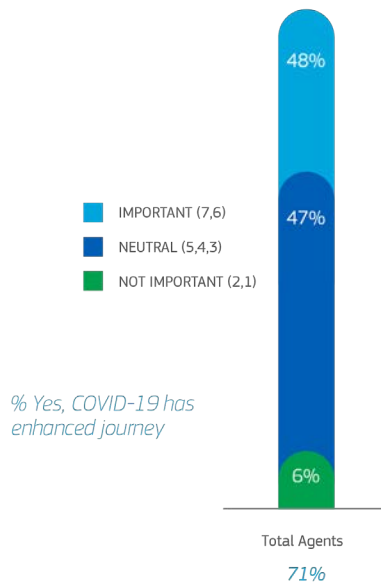


As COVID-19 spread, travelers' health and safety gained importance globally. However, price continues to be the main item of concern for those booking via travel agents. Travelers in general are seeking [price transparency](#) and are ready to spend, but they also want to see value for the experience in return.

Additionally, sustainability moved up a spot, meaning travelers are inquiring more about their trip's environmental impact in 2022 compared to 2019. Similarly, they are paying close attention to travel companies' [sustainability efforts](#) this year as only 7% of agents responded that this topic isn't important to their customers.



**Travel corporations are refocusing on their green agendas. Learn more by downloading our [Sustainable Business Travel whitepaper](#).**



## Interest in door-to-door travel experiences climbs

These types of experiences mean that a travelers' needs are covered from the moment they leave their home to check-in at their hotel until they return home. Although this concept has long existed, COVID-19 has enhanced its relevance as travelers seek a seamless journey now more than ever.

Nearly half of travel agents stated that door-to-door experiences are important to travelers while 7 in 10 agents think COVID-19 has boosted the importance of these journeys, meaning that the services and the guidance offered by travel agents have gained significance amid the pandemic.

**Q: How important is the door-to-door traveler journey to our travelers?**

**Q: Do you think COVID-19 has enhanced this type of journey?**



## GDS usage is on the rise

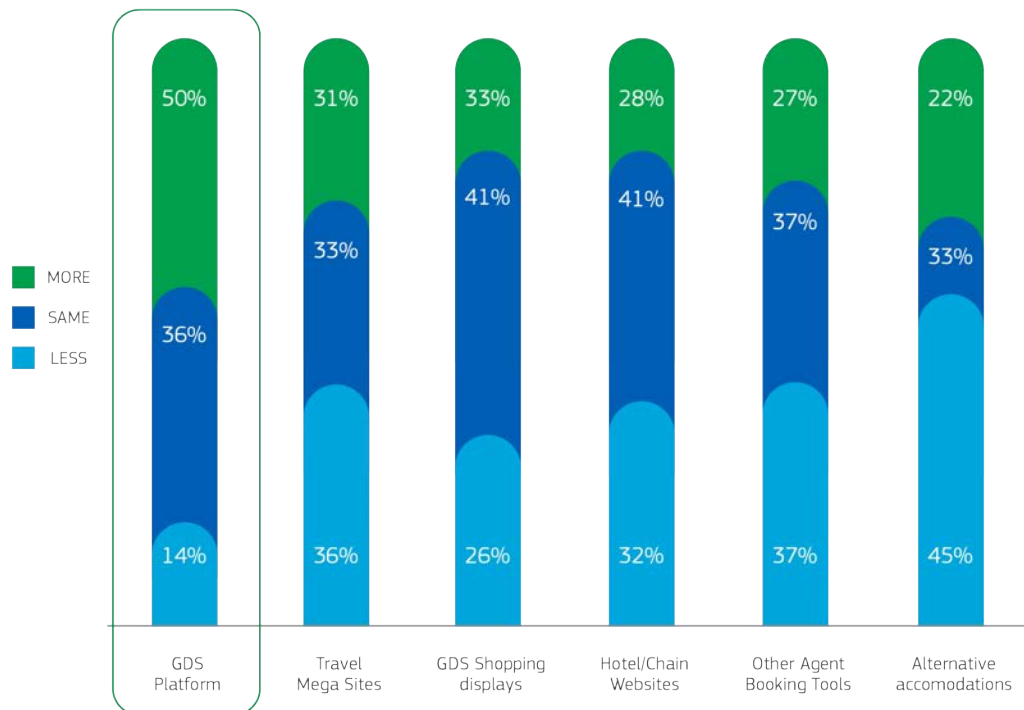
Those who were surveyed agree that GDS usage has been increasing throughout the pandemic, with 60% of travel agents now logging into a GDS more than 4 times a day.

Per survey respondents, GDS usage is increasing at a faster rate than other channels with 50% of agents responding that they are using the platform more now compared to three years ago. Also, GDS usage is growing at a much faster pace than other online booking tools or websites, providing travel agents the opportunity to offer more value to their clients and hoteliers the opportunity to gain more bookings.

*“More and more customers are choosing to work with travel agents for their bookings as they find them more reliable. Agents solve problems for them, unlike online websites.”*

- Anonymous survey respondent

**GDS Shopping Displays:** one sole platform that sources and aggregates all travel content (airline, hotels, rail operators, cruises, etc.) integrated into one location yet deployed on a variety of interfaces

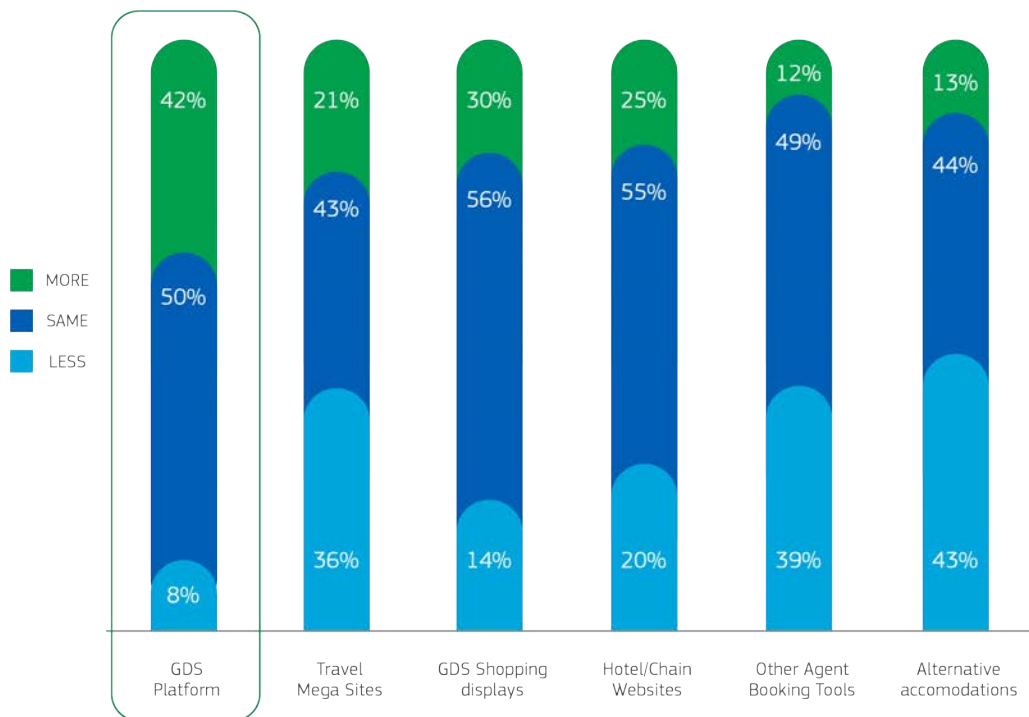


**Q:** Compared to three years (prior to the pandemic) would you say that you were using the following reservations channels more, about the same, or less?

## GDS reigns globally, although other channels are also utilized

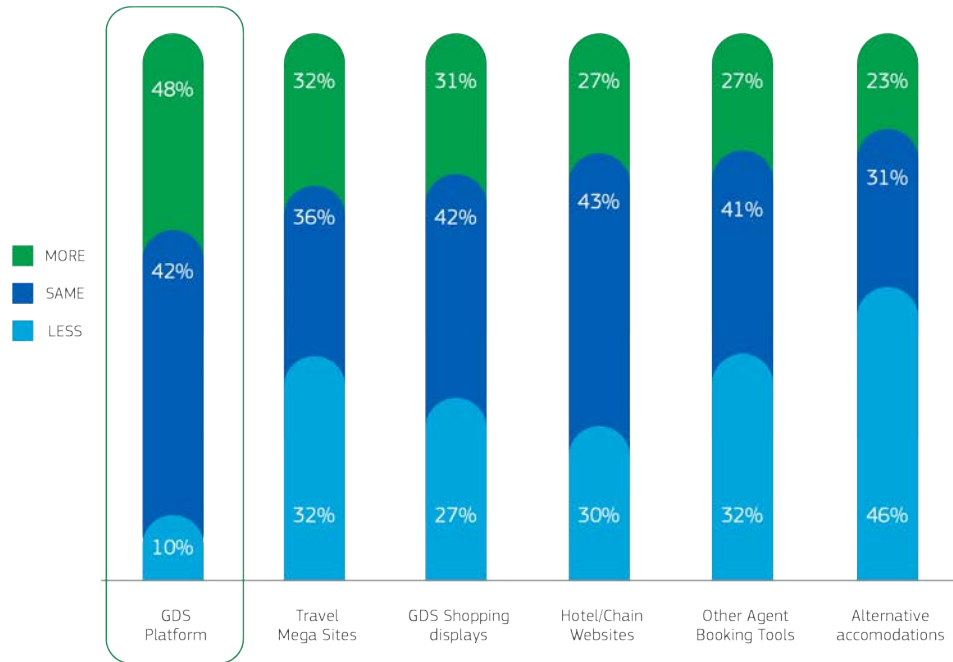
Although GDS usage is on the rise internationally, there are differences in platform preferences by region:

- North American (NORAM) travel agents are booking more through GDS platforms and GDS shopping displays than in 2019.



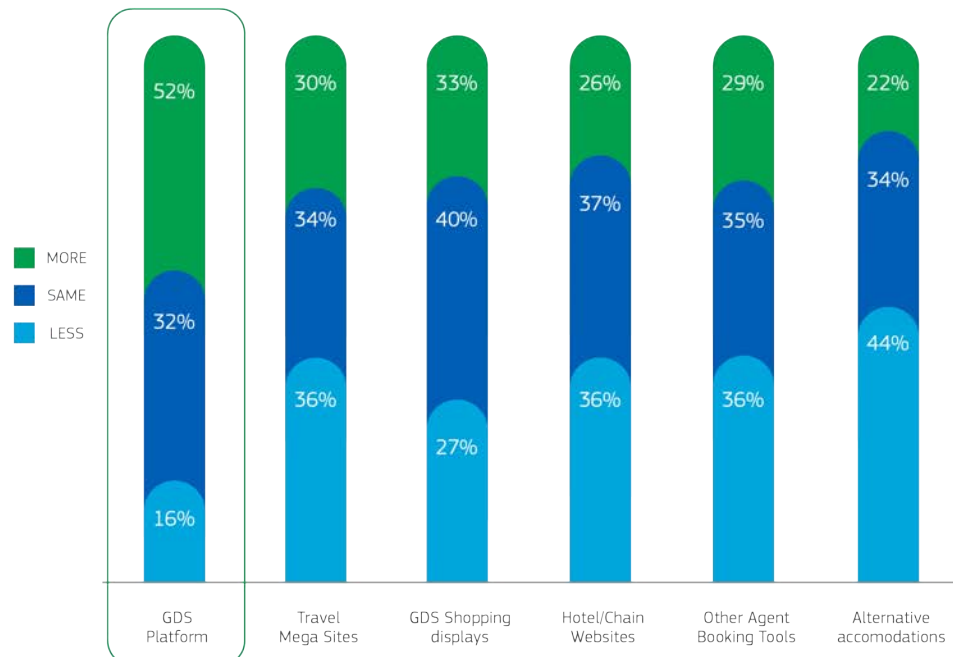
**Q:** Compared to three years (prior to the pandemic) would you say that you were using the following reservations channels more, about the same, or less?

Nearly half of surveyed Latin American (LATAM) travel agents are using GDS platforms, online travel websites and GDS shopping displays more often than in 2019. They currently shop primarily using GDS shopping displays and Brand.com websites.



**Q:** Compared to three years (prior to the pandemic) would you say that you were using the following reservations channels more, about the same, or less?

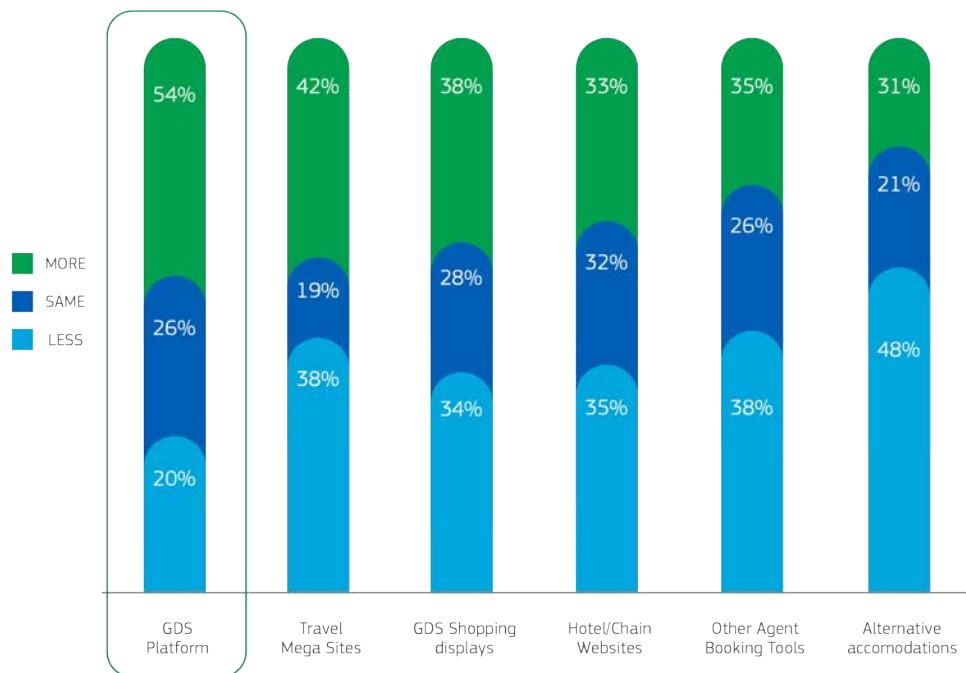
More than half of the surveyed agents from Europe, the Middle East, and Africa (EMEA) are using GDS platforms more often than in 2019.



**Q:** Compared to three years (prior to the pandemic) would you say that you were using the following reservations channels more, about the same, or less?



Nearly 55% of agents from Asia Pacific (APAC) are using GDS platforms more often than in 2019, the highest percentage out of all the regions. However, APAC agents are more likely to use the below listed distribution methods more equally than agents in other regions.



**Q:** Compared to three years (prior to the pandemic) would you say that you were using the following reservations channels more, about the same, or less?

## Why are some agents using GDS less?

Out of the 14% of surveyed agents that responded that they are using GDS less than 3 years ago, most of them reported finding better rates on other platforms or having existing negotiated rates outside of the GDS, which is consistent with responses to a similar question from 2019.

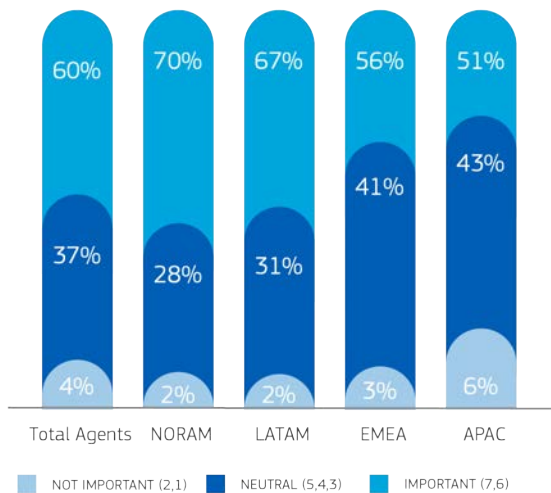


## The importance of rate parity

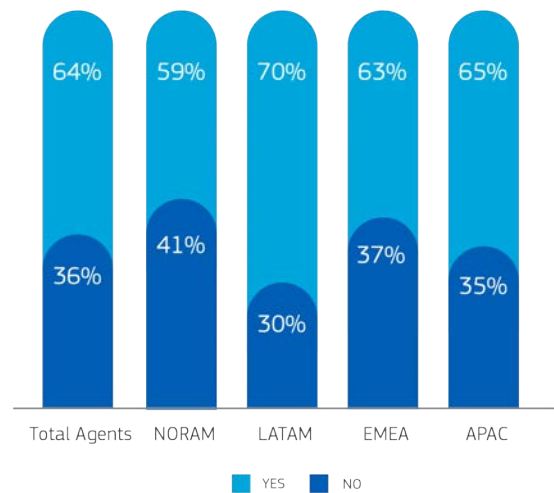
Travel agents worldwide consider rate parity to be of importance. Rate parity, or maintaining consistent rates across several distribution channels, is a crucial practice when engaging with travel agents. Per the survey results, 3 out of every 5 travel agents worldwide actively avoid hotels that don't offer consistent rates across GDS providers.



**Agents in NORAM and LATAM find it especially critical.**



**Q:** How important is it to you to know that the GDS can offer rate parity? (Seven point scale. Very important, Neutral, Not very important)

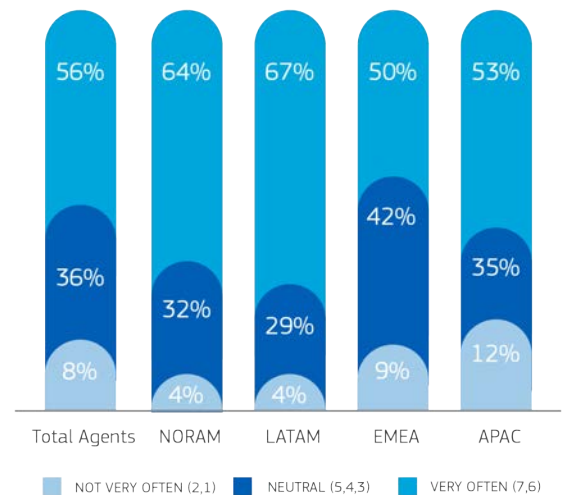


**Q:** When a hotel property does not offer full GDS rate parity, do you actively book away from that hotel property?

## Optimizing hotel content on global distribution systems

Most agents rely on hotel description (HOD) details, which essentially acts as a hotel's electronic brochure or landing page and should tell agents everything they need to know about the property. Out of all regions, agents in NORAM and LATAM rely on HOD details the most often, at 64% and 67% respectively, meaning that an accurate HOD is crucial for a hotel to convert bookings.

When asked what information they're specifically looking for, nearly 80% of agents search for a property's star-rating and photos, followed by hotel services and amenities. These results align with responses received prior to COVID-19.



**Q:** How often do you view the Hotel Description details of a property when making a booking or researching a property (Seven point scale. Very often, Neutral, Not very often)







**Quick tip: To receive greater GDS growth, hoteliers must practice rate and content parity in unison. When hotels actively practice both rate and content parity in a conjoined manner, they can gain a competitive edge and surpass their local competition.**

However, when comparing 2022 to 2019, agents are now looking for more information on HOD, as all content categories show percentage growth. Hotel services and nearby attractions had the highest search increases at 21% and 20% respectively.

	Total Agents 2022	Total Agents 2019
Property rating and photos	• 76%	• 57%
Hotel Services	• 75%	• 54%
Hotel Amenities	• 68%	• 53%
Policy Information	• 60%	• 43%
Attractions/Points of interest	• 54%	• 34%
Other	• 14%	• 11%

**Q: What specific information do you look for/use most when viewing the (HOD) hotel details?**



## Crafting the ideal GDS advertising

88% of agents reported that ads have a level of influence on their buying behavior. Therefore, reaching agents through this channel is a marketing tactic that needs to be prioritized.

Hotels, Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) and other travel providers can choose from a selection of GDS ad placements to target travel agents, including sign-in ads, search availability ads, lock screen ads and sell-time ads. Hotels can also market to travel agents by purchasing the top placements on GDS hotel search screens, or preferred placement products, similar to paid search on search engines.

### Here are key aspects to consider when creating ads:

- **Banner format preferences** vary by region, with the majority of agents (nearly 60%) responding they are neutral to banners with bigger formats. However, new ad spaces such as those on the login page are well received with about 4 out of every 5 of agents responding that those ads are useful.
- As for **keywords**, those related to rates and location are the most effective, with price being a top keyword for travel agents booking a hotel.
- 6 in 10 agents agree that it's important for ads to include "free" or "complimentary" **icons**. Nearly 80% of agents from NORAM responded that it's important for these icons to be included in ads.
- 77% of agents will book because of an ad with a **high-quality offer**, regardless of the screen or product type.



Price is top concern for all travel agents booking a hotel  
**Rate (i.e., discount, promotion) and location keywords are most effective in advertising campaigns**

## What about destination ads on global distribution systems?

To educate the industry and to remain relevant, destinations today advertise on GDSs to reach and engage with tourism professionals. Destination ads typically include resources that will help travel agents deepen their knowledge on the destination and stay on top of industry trends. DMOs advertise their e-learning platforms geared towards travel agents and industry experts, while providing incentives and prizes to further promote enrollment.

## More than half see business travel on the rise

Data from our study shows that demand for business travel is increasing at different percentages by region, varying between 54% and 61%, with the strongest return of corporate travel being recorded in APAC.

It's important to consider the return of this travel segment in ad strategies moving forward. How do you expect your traveler mix to shift in the coming months or years? How can you ensure your pricing model and marketing messages continue to resonate?

Hoteliers and DMOs who wish to reach business travelers must also consider **“bleisure” travelers**, as more of this specific persona enters the market.

To learn more about the return of business travel, download the [How to Attract the New Business Traveler guide](#).



**“bleisure” travelers:**  
professionals who combine  
business and leisure activities  
on the same trip.





## Actionable tips

These survey findings offer valuable insight on how to maximize bookings within GDSs, as well as to how to craft your brand's marketing strategy. Here are five steps you can take today to effectively reach travel agents:

### ---> 1. UNDERSTAND YOUR AUDIENCES AND THEIR NEW PREFERENCES

It's no surprise that traveler habits have changed since the pandemic began and the survey results prove it. Although price, health, and safety continue to lead traveler focus areas, sustainability practices have become more relevant since 2019. To reach leisure travelers, marketers have to keep in mind that travel agents have also experienced shifts and have new needs. They are seen as valued advisors in the COVID-19 era as clients need increasing support to research, book, and readjust plans as needed.

Understanding that a portion of travel agents are using global distribution systems more often, along with the importance they give to rate parity and information accuracy, will allow you to strategize and plan tactics to help your brand better connect with this key audience.

Review our [Rate Parity Playbook](#) to identify and resolve any rate parity issues that may be affecting your property.

Rely on data and business intelligence to gain visibility into the corporations that are booking through travel agencies in your market. This will save you time and effort in identifying which agencies and corporations to develop relationships with, so you can shift GDS share away from your competitive set.

Our [How to Fuel Your Media Strategy with 360-Degree Data eBook](#) shares more data-savvy tactics.

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*“The pandemic has caused travelers to come to travel agencies because they need support from a consultant to understand travel requirements and procedures to follow. It's a good sign for travel agencies.”*

- Anonymous survey respondent

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## ---> 2. ENHANCE YOUR CONTENT ON THE GDSS

Travel brands have to give travel agents the information they are looking for when they need it most. For this reason, hoteliers need to ensure their property's HOD is up to date while keeping their information consistent across booking platforms.

Remember that agents want to be more informed today in order to make better decisions on behalf of their clients. They seek property ratings and photos the most, yet hotel services and nearby attractions are also priorities. Now more than ever, booking policy information is another crucial aspect of HOD as agents and their clients need to be aware of the rules and regulations of their bookings. Create content and ads that are going to resonate with both travelers and travel agents and that will inspire them to book. Highlight flexible booking policies, ancillary services that support remote work, and sustainable experiences that speak to their new motivations and concerns.

Download our [Guide to Optimizing GDS Visibility](#) to learn more on HOD best practices.

## ---> 3. LAUNCH IMPACTFUL GDS MEDIA ADS

Verify you're including:

- ☒ Price(s)
- ☒ Location
- ☒ "Free" or "complimentary" icons
- ☒ Relevant offers or discounts
- ☒ Call-to-action

Content is key when it comes to GDS advertising. Having your brand's main points come across and including keywords that stand out to travel agents will help your ad garner more attention. Leverage icons as eye-catching assets and don't forget to launch customized offers or discounts for particular segments. Remember that travel agents and their clients prioritize price, health, and safety the most. The ideal ad should incorporate references to these items to encourage more clicks and bookings.

#### ---> 4. FOCUS ON DATA WHILE YOU CONTINUOUSLY LEARN, RECONNECT, AND OPTIMIZE

As GDS business grows, it's critical to evaluate where your demand and bookings are coming from and align your strategies accordingly. Data should be at the forefront of your decision making to understand campaign and business performance. Consider the most relevant data sets, including insights from your central reservations system and business intelligence solutions, and filter by region. This will uncover more comprehensive performance details.

Also, continue to build upon established relationships with travel agents with new campaigns and offers specifically for them, considering your most recent GDS ad campaign results and the global travel landscape.



## How can Amadeus help?

Amadeus works with hoteliers and DMOs to increase their visibility and bookings with omni-channel media strategies that anticipate and respond to the needs of their audience. **Amadeus' Media Solutions** delivers targeted, persuasive messaging to travel agents or travel sellers, a valuable audience for hotels, DMOs and travel providers.

Amadeus is the only supplier of multi-GDS advertising, allowing brands to advertise across all three major GDS providers: Amadeus, Sabre, and Travelport. Powered by proprietary insights and industry expertise, the Amadeus Media team offers targeted advertising during the shopping and booking process as well as preferred placement options on GDS. Thanks to our targeting capabilities, campaigns can be scheduled around specific promotions or sales periods, backed by strategies that consider booking lead times. Amadeus' GDS Media specialists can guide you throughout the campaign process, providing data-driven recommendations from start to finish to further boost campaign results. As an added value, Amadeus handles the creative design work needed to launch ads, making the entire process hassle-free.

Hoteliers can also leverage **Agency360+**, the industry's only business intelligence solution that tracks 100% of travel agent bookings across the leading GDS platforms. With forward-looking booking data, hoteliers can identify patterns and capture revenue opportunities early on while understanding which agencies to prioritize. Hoteliers and DMOs can gain insight into agencies booking within their market and into the top corporate agencies and use comprehensive agency profiles to develop new relationships.

By partnering with Amadeus, travel brands can make better informed business decisions, expand their reach across GDS, and elevate their sales.

### Survey methodology

MarketCast, a research, analytics and data science firm, launched the online survey and assessed the results. The survey ran from June 22 - July 12, 2022 and was shared via a link on sign-on messaging and banner ads within Amadeus, Sabre, and Travelport. The findings reported are from 1,004 travel agents located in a total of 61 countries. The statistical accuracy of the survey is at a 95% confidence level.





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*“We encourage travel brands and our Media Solutions clients to connect with travel agents with renewed confidence. Our advertising efforts are backed by innovative technology and real-time insights, helping hoteliers and DMOs garner positive results that align with their objectives.”*

- Scott Falconer, Executive Vice President, Media Solutions, Hospitality, Amadeus

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Amadeus is a technology innovator that connects the entire travel ecosystem at every stage of the journey. Amadeus offers the hospitality industry solutions for reservations, sales and catering, property management and operations, all focused on a better end-to-end experience for guests, employees, managers, owners and partners.

Find out more

For further information, visit [amadeus-hospitality.com](https://amadeus-hospitality.com) or speak to your Amadeus Account Manager today.

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