



VIRTUOSO® DEBUTS GLOBAL FORUMS WITH INSPIRATIONAL SPEAKERS AND TAILORED EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

NEW YORK (March 9, 2016) – [Virtuoso®](#) has successfully concluded its first Global Forums, debuting an interactive town-hall meeting featuring forward-thinking speakers in conjunction with educational opportunities tailored to help its member agencies maintain their leadership position in the industry. Attracting 338 agency owners and managers from 15 countries at two meetings, the Forums offered inspiration and fresh ideas to help these successful business leaders better plan for the future of their agencies. In post-Forum surveys, 100 percent of attendees said they would recommend the event to colleagues.

The Global Forums were held January 27-29, 2016 at the Waldorf Astoria in New York City, and February 18-20 at Terranea Resort in Rancho Palos Verdes, California.

In the Forum opening session, Virtuoso Chairman and CEO Matthew D. Upchurch highlighted how the network has shifted the public conversation to why the right kind of travel advisor is thriving, not merely surviving. He offered as proof the annual Virtuoso Travel Week event, rebranded in 2012, which is now recognized as luxury travel's equivalent of Fashion Week. Media coverage played a major role in this shift. In 2015, Virtuoso achieved more than 25 billion global public relations impressions, a huge jump from 6.2 billion the previous year.

This sea change helped create a preference among luxury travelers for working with a Virtuoso advisor. In 2015, Virtuoso accepted 40 new agencies with 96 locations in 19 countries. The network added 2,414 travel advisors, and much of this growth (57 percent) resulted from additions at existing agencies. In total, Virtuoso now has more than 11,400 advisors at over 380 agencies in 37 countries. Last year the network accounted for U.S. \$15.5 billion in sales.

“Today’s luxury travelers are relationship driven - they crave both human connection and true advising from a travel professional,” noted Upchurch. “Within the media, we’ve been vocal proponents of the advantages of using a trusted advisor who can provide advice, access, advocacy and accountability to clients. Virtuoso has grown more diverse globally to capture more of these discerning luxury experiential travelers, which is driving significant production and success for our members, partners and the entire network.”

Thought-provoking Forum speakers included advertising expert and bestselling author Linda Kaplan Thaler on how people have overcome challenges and failures to triumph. Rafat Ali, CEO of Skift, spoke on the future of travel in 2020. Sasha Strauss, graduate professor at UCLA and USC business schools as well as managing director and founder, Innovation Protocol, addressed the group on how brand leaders can inspire love among their audiences.

Attendees could choose from 12 breakout sessions designed to improve their industry knowledge, led by recognized experts. Topics included succession planning with Bob Joselyn, president, Joselyn Consulting Group & TAMS; charging fees with John Boyens, CEO, The Boyens Group; brand building with Annie Fitzsimmons, contributing editor & Urban Insider, National Geographic Traveler; and legal best practices with ICs with lawyer Rose Hache.

Virtuoso also shined a spotlight on its own programs in 10 additional breakout sessions, outlining what is new for 2015 and how agencies can maximize their benefits from these initiatives:

- **Virtuoso.com** – Debuting this spring is a virtuoso.com advisor dashboard that can be tailored to provide quick links to the most frequently used network resources. It also offers at-a-glance information on network events, news items from partners and Virtuoso, new partner listings and network social media feeds. Thousands of consumers a year are finding Virtuoso advisors through the network’s site, designed to convert leads to clients. Almost 4,000 advisors have profiles on virtuoso.com, and articles on the site

emphasize the value of working with a network advisor. Virtuoso is also testing a live chat function so prospects can connect immediately with advisors.

- Events – New this year, Virtuoso Travel Week Tours are networking events for frontline advisors and suppliers in 26 cities in the U.S. and Canada and 19 cities in Australia, Mexico, South America and Europe. Also new are Virtuoso Professional Development Days, coming to six North American cities, which focus on skills and programs to increase profitability. Changes are also in store for luxury travel’s preeminent event, Virtuoso Travel Week. Attendees will be able to select their own appointments for a significant amount of the formal networking at this year’s event, being held from August 6-12, 2016 in Las Vegas. Virtuoso Travel Week will also expand beyond Bellagio to encompass Aria and Vdara as well.
- Preferred Partners – Virtuoso’s preferred partnerships include the world’s best hotels and resorts, tour operators, On-Sites, tourism boards, lifestyle partners and cruise lines. The network is adding partners strategically to stay ahead of shifting trends and the demand for varied geographies popular with the network’s new influx of global clients, including those from Europe and Asia. In particular, Virtuoso sales of cruise partners grew by 7 percent from 2013 to 2014. Sales of specialty cruises and river cruising are the fastest-growing segments of the portfolio, which also includes contemporary and luxury ocean voyages.
- Marketing – Virtuoso has found that clients who receive its marketing materials spend more than three times on travel compared to clients who do not receive collateral. The network has enhanced its email marketing by offering suggestions for destinations and experiences, all tailored specifically for targeted client and prospect segments. Marketing emails are now all mobile-friendly, and lead with the agency’s brand for increased prominence. Virtuoso is providing additional marketing tools to advisors with the debut of an online image library. Another new offering allows member agencies to opt out of marketing from suppliers they do not sell.
- Training – In 2015, advisors completed 50,000 courses through the network’s professional development site, the Virtuoso Travel Academy. That represented a 25 percent increase over the previous year. More than 800 courses are available in the Academy. Last year, Virtuoso offered almost 1,000 live webinars, with more than 75,000 registrants.

At the Forums, agency owners and managers could receive one-on-one assistance with network programs at the “Brilliant Bar,” where Virtuoso experts helped with everything from lead generation to marketing to Virtuoso Air. Other Forum sessions included Innovation Live, where owners and managers took a deep dive into topics including cruise, training for seasoned advisors and Virtuoso events, and provided recommendations to address issues.

Virtuoso is holding four Regional Forums this year: Mexico City on March 8, Sao Paulo on March 10, London on March 23 and Sydney on April 6 -7.

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About Virtuoso

Virtuoso® is the leading international travel agency network specializing in luxury and experiential travel. This by-invitation-only organization comprises over 380 agency members with more than 11,400 elite travel advisors in over 30 countries throughout North America, Latin America, the Caribbean, Europe, Asia-Pacific, Africa and the Middle East. Drawing upon its preferred relationships with 1,700 of the world’s best hotels and resorts, cruise lines, airlines, tour companies and premier destinations, the network provides its upscale clientele with exclusive amenities, rare experiences and privileged access. More than (U.S.) \$15.5 billion in annual travel sales makes Virtuoso a powerhouse in the luxury travel industry. For more information, visit virtuoso.com.

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