Auction System For Travel Packages, Computer Program Product And Method Thereof

Field of the Invention

This invention relates generally to auction systems for travel packages. In particular, this invention relates to auction systems utilised on radio, internet and other like media.

Background

The travel industry typically involves the marketing, selling and re-selling of travel packages which include transportation, accommodation, food, beverage and other holiday services as required by a customer. These packages are typically marketed to customers through travel agents who liase with travel package providers such as hotels, resorts, airlines and tour operators.

Agents typically market to customers through shop fronts, websites and other advertising media and fix their own prices depending upon the pricing requirements of the travel package providers and their own overhead costs. At the present time, it is not possible for a customer to submit his or her own price or bid for a particular travel package and therefore customers must abide by the prices set by the travel agents.

Whilst travel package providers advertise directly to customers through promotions and the like, these advertising and promotional costs are significant and consequently such travel package providers rely also on travel agents to obtain customers.

Typically, if the vacancy rate of the travel package provider is high due to seasonal factors, then further offers to customers even at a lower cost than the normal rack rate becomes more financially viable for the travel package provider since most costs for hotels and resorts are fixed and the further customers at a reduced cost can only enhance the profitability of the hotel or resort.

Thus, there still exists a need for other parties other than travel agents to liase directly with the travel package providers by offering more numbers of customers even if this rate is usually below the normal or rack rate.

Further, customers require further means to provide flexibility and the opportunity of lowering the cost for their travel packages. Presently, the main avenues for obtaining travel packages are through travel agents and through direct promotions to the travel package provider.

Thus, a need clearly exists for a method, system and computer program product which seeks to alleviate reliance on travel agents and also to allow customers an option to bid for cheaper travel packages within their own predetermined budget and which are able to be accepted by the travel package providers in a confidential manner.

Accordingly, this invention seeks to provide such methods, systems and computer program products whereby the above problems are able to ameliorated.

Summary

In accordance with a first aspect of this invention, there is provided a method of conducting a travel package auction comprising the steps of:

a) informing said clients of the details of a travel package;

b) collecting bids from said clients to form data;

c) transmitting said data to a travel package provider;

d) receiving from said travel package provider the number of bids in said data which are able to be provided by said travel package provider to said clients, and

e) advising said clients of whether their bids were successful.

Preferably, the step a) of informing the clients of the details of a travel package is conducted on a mass media communication network which includes a radio program, a television program or is hosted on a global communications such as the internet or a combination thereof.

Preferably, the step a) of informing the clients of the details of a travel package is conducted on a combination of the radio program and the internet.

Preferably, the method also includes the step of providing a time window to allow said clients to bid for the travel package. The time window is preferably conducted after step a) and before step b). Still preferably, the method may

additionally comprise the step of providing a range of suggested bids for the travel package.

Preferably, the step of providing a time window to allow said clients to bid for the travel package additionally comprises the step of providing a telephone number, electronic mail address or web site address to lodge bids.

Preferably, the step of collecting the bids from said clients to form data comprises the step of obtaining from the bidder information about the desired travel package.

Preferably, the step of collecting the bids from said clients to form data comprises the step of obtaining from the bidder information about the name and contact details of the bidder.

Preferably, the step of collecting the bids from said clients to form data comprises the step of obtaining from the bidder information about the amount of the bid.

Preferably, the step of collecting bids from said clients is conducted by way of collecting bids from said clients by way of a telephone call centre or by collecting bids through an internet web site.

In accordance with a second aspect of this invention, there is disclosed a travel auction system having at least one server and a plurality of clients, said system including:

means for informing said clients of the details of a travel package;

means for collecting bids from said clients to from data; transmitting said data to a travel package provider;

means for receiving from said travel package provider the number of bids in said data which are able to be provided by said travel package provider to said clients; and

means for advising said clients of whether their successful bids were successful.

Preferably, the means of informing the clients of the details of a travel package is by way of a mass media communication network which includes a radio program, a television program, a global communications network or a combination thereof. Still preferably, the means is a combination of the radio program and the internet.

Preferably, the means of providing a time window to allow said clients to bid for the travel package additionally comprises means of providing a range of suggested bids for the travel package.

Preferably, the means of providing a time window to allow said clients to bid for the travel package additionally comprises means of providing a telephone number, electronic mail address or web site address to lodge bids.

Preferably, the means of collecting bids from said clients to form data comprises means of obtaining from the bidder information about the desired travel package.

Preferably, the means of collecting bids from said clients to form data comprises means of obtaining from the bidder information about the name and contact details of the bidder.

Preferably, the means of collecting bids from said clients to form data comprises means of obtaining from the bidder information about the payment details and the amount of the bids.

In accordance with a third aspect of this invention, there is disclosed a computer program product having a computer usable medium having a computer readable program code means embodied therein for conducting a travel auction, said computer program product comprising:

computer readable program code means for informing said clients of the details of a travel package;

computer readable program code means for collecting bids from said clients to form data;

computer readable program code means for transmitting said data to a travel package provider;

computer readable program code means for receiving from said travel package provider the number of bids in said data which are able to be provided by said travel package provider to said clients, and

computer readable program code means for advising said clients of whether their bids were successful.

Preferably, the computer readable program code means for informing the clients of the details of a travel package is a means for being hosted on a global communications network such as the internet, a radio program, a television program or a combination thereof. Still preferably, the computer readable program code means is a combination of the radio program and the internet.

Preferably, the computer readable program code means of providing a time window to allow said clients to bid for the travel package additionally comprises computer readable program code means of providing a range of suggested bids for the travel package.

Preferably, the computer readable program code means of providing a time window to allow said clients to bid for the travel package additionally comprises computer readable program code means of providing a telephone number, electronic mail address or web site address to lodge bids.

Preferably, the computer readable program code means of collecting the bids from said clients to form data comprises computer readable program code means of obtaining from the bidder information about the desired travel package.

Preferably, the computer readable program code means of collecting the bids from said clients to form data comprises computer readable program code means of obtaining from the bidder information about the name and contact details of the bidder.

Preferably, the computer readable program code means of collecting the bids from said clients to form data comprises computer readable program code means of obtaining from the bidder information about the payment details and the amount of the bids.

Brief Description of the Drawings

A preferred embodiment of the invention is described hereinafter with reference to the drawings, in which:

FIG. 1 is a flowchart illustrating a system and method of conducting a travel package auction in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the invention; and

FIG. 2 is a block diagram illustrating the computer program product for conducting the system and method of conducting a travel package auction as shown in FIG. 1.

Detailed Description

A preferred embodiment of the travel auction system and a method for conducting a travel auction are described. In the following description of the preferred embodiment, numerous details are described in order to provide a more thorough description of this embodiment. It becomes apparent to one skilled in the art, however, that the invention may be practised without such details. In other instances, well-known details have not been described at length so as not to obscure the invention.

The advantages of the embodiment of this invention are manifold. One advantage is that the travel package provider is able to minimise advertising and promotion costs by participating in the travel auction system. Alternatively, the travel auction system, method and computer program product thereof provide an alternative source of customers and are able to be utilised in addition to traditional sources such as travel agents and direct advertising and promotion.

Another advantage of the embodiment of this invention is that customers are more likely to buy a travel package if they are able to bid a lower price then the normal or rack rate of the travel package. As a result of this, customers are more likely to buy the travel package.

Referring now to FIG. 1, there is illustrated a system and a method for conducting a travel auction in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the invention. The method comprises a first step 1 of providing details of available holiday packages from hotel resorts to the travel auction co-ordinating body depicted and named as "TRAVEL AUCTIONS PTE LTD" in FIG.1. Typically, in this example, this step involves the prior agreement of a hotel resort or other travel package provider to the system and method in accordance with the preferred embodiment of the invention. After reaching a suitable agreement with the hotel resort, the step 2 of providing a description or information regarding the holiday

package is aired on a radio program or other mass media communications device and/or uploaded on an internet website. If the description of the holiday package is aired on a radio program then the appropriate details or information are transmitted to a radio station so that a radio advertisement can be broadcast. Typically, the details or information about the holiday package are, for example, the number of nights, meals, transfers, dates, etc of the holiday package.

As shown in Fig. 1, the information or details of the holiday package is also uploaded on a website/ server. This is to enable bidders to lodge their bids by way of the internet. The internet users would simply have to register with the website by lodging their personal information details so that they are able to lodge their bids for travel packages with the travel auction co-ordinating body.

Thereafter, the time period by which bidders must lodge their bid for the holiday package is transmitted by way of the radio program or the internet website. However, it is understood that other mass media communication devices can also be utilised for the transmission of information regarding the travel holiday packages. This step is shown as step 3 in Fig. 1. Typically, this time period may be any suitable time period and in this example the time period is 30 to 60 minutes after the end of the radio program. The bidders may bid by way of calling a telephone call centre or by way of the internet web site.

The bidders then proceed with step 4 where the bidders lodge their bids by way of value of the bid for the holiday package. The bidder's personal contact details are also provided where the bids are lodged through the call centre. The transmission of the bids typically occurs either by way of telephone to a call centre or via the website/server and is shown as step 5 in Fig.1. In the step 5, the value and number of bids are collated into a database together with the personal contact details of the bidders. After the period of time, which bids are to be lodged, has expired, the total value of the bids and the number of bidders transmitted to the Hotel Resort. This is done typically by way of fax or other electronic means. The Hotel Resort then advises the central co-ordinating body in step 7 regarding the number of accepted bids for travel packages. Under step 8, the central co-ordinating body advises bidders whether their bids were successful.

The steps 2 to 11 of the preferred embodiment of the invention can be implemented using a computer program product such as, for example, a computer system as shown in Fig.2. In particular, the steps 2 to 11 can be implemented as software, or computer readable program code, executing on the computer system that enables the server.

The computer system comprises a computer having the controller, the memory, input/output (I/O) interfaces and a storage device. The memory may include random access memory (RAM) and read only memory (ROM). The storage device can be for example a floppy disk, a hard disk drive, a magneto-optical disk drive, CD-ROM, magnetic tape or any other of a number of non-volatile storage devices well known to those skilled in the art. Elements within the computer are typically connected to each other via an internal bus. The internal bus in turn can consist of data, address, and control buses. The I/O interface couples the computer to, for example, the Internet via the communication resource.

For user-accessibility reasons, the computer system can further comprise input devices such as a keyboard and a mouse that are connected to the computer via the I/O interface. Other than these input devices, the computer can have a video interface for coupling to a video display of the computer system.

The software or computer readable program code, executing on the computer system may be stored in a computer readable medium, including the storage device. The computer system includes the computer readable medium having such software or program code recorded such that instructions of the software or the program code can be carried out. The use of the computer system preferably effects advantageous apparatuses for supporting travel package auction for clients in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the invention.

The computer system is simply provided for illustrative purposes, and other configurations can be employed without departing from the scope and spirit of the invention. The foregoing is merely an example of the types of computers or computer systems with which the preferred embodiment of the invention may be enabled. Typically, the method of the preferred embodiment can reside as software or a computer readable program code recorded on a hard disk drive (generally

depicted on the storage device) that provides a computer readable medium, and read and controlled using the controller. Intermediate storage of the program code and media content data and any data fetched from the network may be accomplished using the memory, possibly in concert with the storage device.

In the foregoing description, a travel package auction system having a plurality of clients and at least one server, a method and a computer program product for conducting a travel package auction are described. Only one preferred embodiment is described. However, it is apparent to one skilled in the art in view of the preferred embodiment that numerous changes and/or modifications can be made without departing from the scope and spirit of the invention.

Claims

1. A method of conducting a travel package auction for clients comprising the steps of: a) informing said clients of the details of a travel package;
   b) collecting bids from said clients to form data;
   c) transmitting said data to a travel package provider;
   d) receiving from said travel package provider the number of bids in said data which are able to be provided by said travel package provider to said clients, and
   e) advising said clients of whether their bids were successful.
2. A method according to claim 1, wherein the step a) of informing the clients of the details of a travel package is conducted on a mass media communication network.
3. A method according to claim 2 wherein the mass media communication network includes a radio program, a television program, a global communications network or a combination thereof.
4. A method according to any one of the preceding claims wherein the mass media communication network includes a combination of the radio program and the internet.
5. A method according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein there is an additional step of providing a time window to allow said clients to bid for the travel package which is conducted after step a) and before step b).
6. A method according to claim 5, wherein the step of providing a time window to allow said clients to bid for the travel package additionally comprises the step of providing contact information for lodging said bids.
7. A method according to claim 1, wherein the step b) of collecting bids from said clients to form data further comprises the step of obtaining from the bidder information about the desired travel package.
8. A method according to claim 1, wherein the step b) is conducted by way of collecting bids from said clients by way of a telephone call centre or by collecting bids through an internet web site.

9. A method according to claim 1, wherein the step b) of collecting bids from said clients to form data comprises the step of obtaining from said client information about the amount of said bid.

10. A travel package auction system having at least one server and a plurality of clients, said system including:

means for informing said clients of the details of a travel package;

means for collecting bids from said clients to form data; transmitting said data to a travel package provider;

means for receiving from said travel package provider the number of bids in said data which are able to be provided by said travel package provider, to said clients and

means for advising said clients of whether their bids were successful.

11. A travel package auction system according to claim 10, wherein the means for informing said clients of the details of a travel package is a mass media communication network.

12. A travel package auction system according to claim 9, wherein the means for informing said clients is a radio program, a television program, a global communications network or a combination thereof.

13. A travel package auction system according to any one of claims 10 to 12 wherein the means for informing said clients is a combination of the radio program and the internet.

14. A travel package auction system according to claim 10, which further comprises a means for providing a time window to allow said clients to bid for the travel package.

15. A travel package auction system according to claim 14, wherein the means for providing a time window includes a means of providing contact information for lodging said bids.

16. A travel package auction system according to claim 10, wherein the means for collecting bids from said clients to form data further comprises a means of obtaining from said client information about the desired travel package.

17. A travel package auction system according to claim 10, wherein the means for collecting bids further comprises a means of obtaining information about the amount of said bid.

18. A travel package auction system according to claim 10, wherein the means for collecting bids is by way a telephone call centre or by collecting bids through an internet web site.

19. A computer program product having a computer usable medium having a computer readable program code means embodied therein for conducting a travel package auction, said computer program product comprising:

computer readable program code means for informing said clients of the details of a travel package;

computer readable program code means for collecting bids from said clients to form data;

computer readable program code means for transmitting said data to a travel package provider;

computer readable program code means for receiving from said travel package provider the number of bids in said data which are able to be provided by said travel package provider to said clients, and

computer readable program code means for advising said clients of whether their bids were successful.

20. A computer program product according to claim 15, which additionally comprises

computer readable program code means for providing a time window to allow said clients to bid for the travel package.

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