

WITH NEW STORE OPENING, TRADITIONAL TRAVEL AGENTS FIGHT BACK

THE traditional bricks and mortar travel agent is fighting back.

Following a major operational overhaul that saw expansion plans shelved and some poorly located stores closed, retail agency Liberty Travel is set to embark on a new era of growth.

Today the 59-year-old travel agency opened its first new store in more than two years.

The new store on Manhattan's East 8th Street will be followed by other new stores in South New Jersey and Syracuse in the coming weeks.

President Billy McDonough said the expansion heralded the beginning of a new era for one of the USA's oldest travel companies.

"During the past two years, we invested heavily in the business to change the look and feel of our shops and to ensure we were in the best possible locations," Mr. McDonough said.

"This process is now complete.

"Our shop network is performing better and we are ready to capitalize on any improvements in market conditions.

"There have been positive signs recently.

"Within our business, customer enquiry has been strong and demand is beginning to improve as the economy slowly recovers."

Mr. McDonough said other recent changes in the business included the development of new websites that provided comprehensive destination information to travelers and generated customer enquiry for Liberty's stores. The website and rational media marketing has also been updated with a new marketing slogan positioning Liberty Travel as "America's Vacation Experts"

He said the changes were part of an overall plan to increase Liberty's share of the large US offline travel market, while continuing to provide a viable alternative for disillusioned online customers.

"While the internet has changed the industry enormously in the United States, the reality is the internet does not appeal to everyone who is booking a vacation.

"Many people like to research online and to finalize their plans face to face or via the phone.

"In particular, customers with complex vacation planning needs will generally want to discuss their options with a vacation expert.

"The frustration experienced by trying to do it themselves is increasingly driving new customers to Liberty Travel.

"Customers also gain additional peace of mind from knowing they can pick up the phone and talk to someone if something goes wrong."

Liberty Travel operates more than 160 leisure travel shops within the US, with a strong presence in New York, New Jersey, Philadelphia and New England. Stores are also located in Chicago, Los Angeles and Florida.

In addition to leisure travel, Liberty Travel also specializes in group travel, tours and business travel.

Liberty Travel is part of Flight Centre Limited, an Australian-based global travel group that operates more than 2,000 leisure, corporate and wholesale travel stores in 11 countries.

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