

25TH April 2014

Dear ~~Editor, The Times~~ Senior Management, HomeAway Inc,

There was a time when a letter to "The Times" would have sufficed. I was however unsure whether our good friends at HomeAway had appropriated this medium as well and my carefully penned letter may have found itself as a paper aeroplane to be enjoyed by the people who occasionally answer the phones.

I did also consider asking for an entry in the obituary column, but was unsure as to whether they would accept our family business alongside Sir Reginald Warhorse DSO and his exploits in the Crimea (now there is a thought).

To try and articulate the effect that the crushing weight of an impacting meteorite would have on a human body is not easy, but seems a fair analogy to our recent problems in the self catering business. If you have a moment to listen then please read on, I expect no sympathy and I expect to go down with the ship (an unusual event these days!) if things don't change!

My family and staff have been carefully representing owners of local second homes in deepest Derbyshire, the Peak District to be exact, for many years. What a joy it has been to meet and work with owners, talk to guests, help them enjoy and embrace the local culture and environment and many come back year on year. Oh how times and attitudes have changed!

Personally I still love shooting grouse and fly fishing for grayling, I still reminisce about days gone by when winters were snowy and summers were warm and sunny and "Health and Safety" was a dodgy top shelf magazine. It seems to be harder however to support my, some would say, expensive hobbies from my business income. I am told by my staff that this fault lies to a large extent at the door of your company.

Surrounded as I am by young, technology literate staff all with "entrepreneur" as a middle name, I would have to be senile not to have adopted new measures and tried to adapt; survival of the fittest and all that. There does seem to be a new harshness and unpleasant flavour to this seriously personal business.

I do know that the world moves on: colour TV, washing machines, microwaves, fewer servants, ready-made meals (apparently). Ann Aguirre's quote "But the world moves on....." comes to mind or as the Beatles said "Life goes on within you and without you". There is a "but" however and I do feel that the senior chaps at your prestigious company may want to chat about this at the next round of golf, your company pheasant shoot or Ascot.

I and some of the chaps who are in the same business (we call ourselves the SCCC: "self catering & Cricket club", bit of a play on the MCC; quite clever really) recently visited a few of our favourite vineyards in France to savour a few young vintages. As luck would have it we bumped into some jolly decent fellows who were in the same business as us. After a great afternoon in the Loire valley we retired to a local hostelry and conversation gravitated to business. Well, really, wine can make for unusual and rather interesting expletives, especially in Franglais!

To cut a very long story short it was apparent that it wasn't just our guests and my staff who were getting more annoyed (which I had put down to the economy and bad weather) it was also all my local travelling pals and the Frenchies with the same issues. So we convened a rather drunken war office and I was appointed foreign correspondent. I have picked up the threads now that James has safely out the Bentley to hay.

Don't get us wrong, we appreciate the help you gave us in the war and some great films, but this is business and I have an estate to run. The amount the accountant tells me we have spent with your business would seem to illustrate that you have your own estates to support now as well, so let's make this equitable. Next time you tee

off, get the chaps together and discuss some of our suggestions below. You will be pleasantly surprised I suspect by the reaction from others in our industry! So specifically:

1. No more clever underhand emails to guests who have enquired to us sending them elsewhere, especially the rogues down the road.
2. it's a free world of course and you can take as many advertisers who are as gullible as us to pay you, but we want a fair shot at the target and to be seen by both new guests and the old ones regularly. There's no point in lining your pockets for no reason.
3. If you insist on creating online "quotes", make sure they are absolutely correct. We will be sending bills to HomeAway soon for the endless phone calls we receive about wrong prices and as a barrister by trade, you may also be surprised by my charges too!
4. If you continue to suggest to guests that our bank (you can only be invited to this bank by the way) is unreliable and we are thoroughly dishonest and not to be trusted chaps, I may have to dust off my wig!
5. We have read your terms and conditions. So when we sign it, do not change the goalposts. When we signed the agreement for one year, it was signed for the arrangements in place at that moment, not what you may want to do on a whim!
6. More investment in your phone service. Don't automate everything!
7. Many of our adverts, shown to me by my staff, look dreadful. I am told this is an "upgrade". When I upgrade to first class I do not expect to sit on the wing.
8. My techies say that your administration systems are very slow and laborious. Invest some of our hard earned money in improving your systems. You're welcome!
9. Address your priorities. My secretary apparently uses a site called Booking.com to get good prices for my trips to the capital. If this is your intention for our local personal service business we need clarity and direction. Do not bleed us dry to support your goals to become a supermarket for self catering. Samantha does say however if she phones direct now it's cheaper to speak to the manager. Not sure why she wouldn't do that anyway.
10. Please invest some of your funds in a charitable concern I am establishing: "HomeLess", for those who own or manage second homes and can no longer support their staff and cost structures.

Good lord, I may need to sell the sell the home in Monaco if it goes on like this.

Yours,

Sir Berty Bristle-Thwaite Q.C., DSC