

# Travel Trade®

## RCI Promotes eTools With Sweepstakes

BY NICK VERRASTRO

Royal Caribbean International is running an eTools of the Trade Sweepstakes over the next six months to get agents to test the tools, RCI senior vice president of sales Vicki Freed announced last week on the Travel Executive Forum Webinar sponsored by the Host agency America's Vacation Center.



Vicki Freed

It was one of the first travel agent forums Freed has appeared on since her move from Carnival to Royal stunned the industry back in January.

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Freed also told the agents on the Webinar that RCI is tweaking its groups policy to be more friendly to agents, who should expect an announcement soon.

Sweepstakes prizes include a \$1,000 gas card and GPS to be drawn this month from those agents who sign up for and complete the line's University of WOW at [cruisingpower.com](http://cruisingpower.com).

Prizes in the coming months will include a 50-inch plasma TV for those agents who sign up to use the agency locator on

the RCI consumer Web site, a \$2,000 Amex gift card, a trip to the Genesis float out in Turku, Finland and free cruises, among other prizes to be awarded in drawings from those agents who try RCI's eTools.

More than 1,000 questions came in from agents participating in the Forum, and some touched on Freed's job change from Carnival's top sales executive to RCI's top sales and travel agent

point person.

A Pennsylvania agent asked, "What is the biggest difference between RCI and other major cruise lines?"

Freed said the number one difference is RCI's commitment to agents. "We are very pro travel agent; everything goes right back to the agent. We want to be easy to do business with. And our ships — hardware and service. No one can compete with the experience we deliver."

A California agent asked whether Freed plans to revive her "Vicki Loves Travel Agents" blog — popular when she was at Carnival — because he liked it for its sales and marketing ideas.

Freed said she plans to have quarterly e-coffee breaks with travel agents where she'll share sales and marketing tips. She told agents to use RCI's business development managers because they are well-schooled in marketing and sales strategies for agents.

Freed pushed RCI's technology tools.

The RCI eTools, said Freed, "can differentiate your brand in the marketplace. They are free and easy to use and are proven to work. They are the key to your success."

Freed said that when agents use the eConnect tool to email offers to clients, the booking ratio among those who open the email is close to 50%.

"Use it or leave money on the table," she said. "Your name, your address and phone and email appear on the message — there is no direct call to action from RCI. This tool works."

She said agents are not taking advantage of the free Yellow Pages-like ads the line offers graduates of its University of WOW on the agency locator that appears on the RCI consumer site.

"We only had 4,000 agents sign up for this and agents are not taking advantage of this," Freed said.

"The eTools we have are amazing and they are easy to use. I encourage agents to try them because they are here to help you develop new business."

Separately, AVC co-president Brad Anderson said he is amazed that cruise and land tour sales continue at a strong pace for his Host agency, an America Express Travel Representative, even in the face of the economic slowdown.