

Jay Tusa, director of TDC, introduction.

Ashley Horsely with 360 Blue Properties informed the audience of potential changes coming to VRBO that could impact rental management companies and homeowners with rental properties:

- Match Back
- Increase in subscription fees
- 10-12% fee added to guest
- VRBO collecting 20% from bookings
- Taking guest experiences from home owners or rental management companies and fielding questions to call centers not familiar with the area

David Demarest talked to the audience about the opportunities Visit South Walton (TDC) can offer at the moment and maybe in the future:

- Property listings on the Visit South Walton website (now)
- Locally managed badge/local expert (future)
- Expanding cooperative opportunities (future)

Derek Berube with 30A Sea Story (boutique property management firm) suggested:

- Visit South Walton to become a destination site similar to HomeAway or VRBO with the ability to easily cut and paste information onto the Visit South Walton website
- Having the Visit South Walton site have tighter integration with social media
- Local badging

Jason Sprenkle with 360 Blue Properties said the county should back the property management companies and rental home owners who advertise book direct.

Renee Clayton with Beach Condos in Destin suggested Visit South Walton provide national advertising with a badge that showed through Visit South Walton advertising as well as the accommodation partners advertising.

Unidentified gentlemen discussed the hotel side about moving away from the Online Travel Agencies. He informed the audience that they have been successful by threatening the OTAs with removal of their properties for a lower rate. Accommodation partners in the area need to unite with the same threat of leaving if a chance is to take place.

Derek Berube stated it would be hard for management companies to get new home owners to list through them if not affiliated with VRBO since distribution is a highly asked question.

Ashley Horsely said Match Back takes effect March 15th – Match Back is when VRBO determines themselves or property management of how the booking of a guest came about. VRBO says it won't impact ranking but she is not hopeful that is the truth.

Elizabeth Love with Platinum Vacations of Destin mentioned some businesses cannot afford that and those additional VRBO fees might be forced on guest.

Derek Berube suggested using the Visit South Walton website as an alternative of VRBO where all rental home owners and management companies list their properties on VSW so all of the inventory is on one website.

- Have properties arranged by listing with filters such as party size, dates, and maybe ability to share companies calendar
- Broken up by beach neighborhoods

BJ Shell with HomeAway, software division, clarified changes coming to VRBO.

- Any listing purchased from March 15th on will be subjected to the new rules but any listings ones currently have or haven't expired won't be subjected to the new rules
- If one using paper booking through HomeAway those individuals will not be impacted by the changes
- Subscriptions listing may have an impact with how it is run and what is being charged
- HomeAway needs owners or management companies to self-report Match Back bookings and the only if a guest inquires about the listing through VRBO. HomeAway won't know how booking is made if the details of how it was found is not attributed

Laura Clayton with Beach Condos in Destin was encouraged with Emerald Coast By Owner to use social media for a hashtag campaign of #bookdirect but thought it would be beneficial for VSW to purchase some billboard ads #bookdirect and fly banners with #bookdirect – say no to VRBO redirecting guest to VSW website. Make guest well aware of VRBO fees before they book.

Etoi Moore said she is having a problem with the VRBO subscription – unless she renews for online booking she will not be able to renew to use VRBO. VRBO doesn't give homeowners enough time to screen guest before confirming the booking – only gives them 24 hours before it's confirmed. Asked VSW team if they were looking in to adding a calendar option to their website for accommodation partners?

David Demarest and Jay Tusa said the calendar option is something they would look into when revamping the website.

Brittany Garger with Gibson Beach Rentals feels VSW should not become a booking website for guest. Booking should be left up to the rental management company or home owner. Should push book direct message but consumer doesn't know what that means – VSW should come up with material for its website to post what it means to book direct and what they will save then tell them how to contact the appropriate accommodation partners for booking. Sends postcards, apps, emails to let guest know about saving on fees or any promotions (discounts).

Ashley Horsely important for guest to know that the properties are listed by rental management companies/home owners and not VRBO. South Walton has an 80-85% of customers are repeat business – should be easy to contact them and let them know how to book direct.

Dave ? said he uses Emerald Coast By Owner to list his properties instead of VRBO. He is not subjected to any fees, can screen guest, and hasn't had any issues using them.

Unidentified gentleman – what is the expectation of success for the website?

Jay Tusa – have to look at it once future along in process because it is evolving at the moment.

Jim Dixon with 30A Escapes believes the TDC should just promote the rental companies and home owners and let those businesses focus on booking the guest. TDC should support Emerald Coast By Owner and Rent 30A as an alternative to VRBO.

Amy Coble with Homeowners Collection, Seaside – customer use VRBO to see what the area has to offer for rentals. Explains to guest why they shouldn't use VRBO or HomeAway and offers direct competitors information if it benefits the guest.

Ron Larson homeowner needs to book with VRBO and HomeAway since they are the larger businesses – VRBO has cut off communication with guest. Suggested working together with surrounding TDCs to make a larger impact.

Joe D? – agrees the VSW team should use a co-op program, use badge, updates on websites, and get more people behind the movement.