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ACTION! ALERT

Flight Fairy takes off

New Web site for gay travelers cashing in on the three-dollar bill

By [CHRISTOPHER SEELY](#)

Bob Hope's new gay Web-based travel company is preening itself as a place for savvy gay jet-setters to spend their money, but the site's name might get in the way for some.

Since the sit launched in mid-August, response has been "enthusiastic," said Hope, founder of [FlightFairy.com](#) and co-owner of Hope-Beckham, an Atlanta public relations firm.

"Not being gay myself, I asked about the name," he said. "I was concerned that there might be some sensitivity to the name. If there was, our intention is to be attentive and open to the market place, and if someone got upset we'd change the name."

But the name could deter potential customers because it attaches gay consumers to the word "fairy," said Robert Wilson, executive director of the International Gay & Lesbian Travel Association, a member group for gay and gay-friendly travel professionals.

"Of course one assumes that they are deciding on a humorous approach, but my first reaction would be that the traveling members of gay and lesbian communities are not readily impressed by the word 'fairy,'" Wilson said.

FlightFairy blossomed when Worldspan, one of Hope's clients at Hope-Beckham, released information showing that gay travelers tend to put more time and energy than straight travelers into finding unique vacation spots, which could make gays an attractive marketing target, Hope said.

Worldspan provides a network of travel accommodations, like hotels and car rental companies, for online travel businesses to use as links on their Web sites.

Currently, the FlightFairy Web site is up and running, but the word "gay" doesn't appear anywhere on the site.

Unless the cartoon fairy flitting at the top of the Web site's home page and the name itself are intended to imply that the site is for gay travelers, there is no indication online that the site seeks gay travelers.

The idea for a gay travel site is not new for members of the International Gay & Lesbian Travel Association. The travel trade networking group boasts a membership of more than 1,000, and as many as 300 members of IGLTA have "dedicated sites" for gay travelers, Wilson said.

Among the largest are Gay.com's travel microsite, and Zoom Vacations, an online gay travel agency.

Several burgeoning sites in search of the proverbial \$3 bill consult IGLTA.



Bob Hope, an Atlanta public relations executive, launched FlightFairy.com for gay travelers, though it includes little mention of gay men and lesbian


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"They want to know how they can clean up and achieve a better bottom line from gay and lesbian travelers," Wilson said. "I would think the dedicated sites are more familiar with what [gay] clients require. The large sites just do the same tours and put a rainbow flag on there."

High profile travel Web sites Travelocity and Orbitz also recently hopped on the gay bandwagon.

Orbitz beefed up its marketing campaign with a micro-site for gays within its larger Web site in June 2002. But FlightFairy will be better attuned to the needs of a gay traveler than Orbitz, Hope said.

"You don't become a customer of a micro-site, but of Orbitz," he said. "We are going to focus exclusively on that marketplace. We want it to be a community online for gay travel."

Travelocity, in a new commercial ad campaign shown in Europe, employs characters that are stereotypically gay to be "edgy and playful," said Charlotte Harper, marketing director for Travelocity in Britain.

The ad features a series of male flight attendants who plug Travelocity services using thinly veiled sexual innuendo.

"I can get you off first thing in the morning," one fey character says.

America Online, which affiliates with Travelocity for travel purchases, also offers extensive information on gay travel options at keyword: Gay Travel.

Hope envisions an empire similar to Martha Stewart's homemaker media monopoly with FlightFairy.

A television travel talk show is in the works for trailblazing gays who have taken "uncommon planned trips" and shared the experiences with fellow gays and straight people alike, he said.

"It is our understanding that the gay and lesbian marketplace has the money and plan trips more meticulously than average travelers," Hope said.

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