



**TRAVEL PROFESSIONAL INTERVIEWS**

# John Chernesky

Travel Professional Interviews

Agency Membership

Agent Membership



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# **SVP, North America Sales & Trade Marketing Princess Cruises & Cunard Line**

**Tell us about your career in the travel industry. How did you start out?  
What attracted you to travel?**

After dropping out of kindergarten, my first job was in the Hotel Services Department at Princess Cruises. I was a Coordinator supporting the ships, which was a great way for me to start building relationships with the shipboard teams – many of whom I still know today! My world expanded when the SVP of Fleet Operations hired me to essentially be his chief of staff. The blinders I had been wearing were ripped off and suddenly I was exposed to the broader business, interacting daily with the CFO, CMO and President/CEO. I then became heavily involved with supporting the design development for our Newbuild program because my boss was leading that initiative. Fast forward 27 years later and I'm still here, having gained exposure to various divisions (Entertainment, Onboard Revenue, Sales). What's not to love about travel? Our purpose in life is to ensure our guests have the most amazing vacation experiences. We're lucky to be in this industry!

**You've been at the sales helm of Princess Cruises since 2015. What have been some of the highlights of the past four years?**



Other than my bobblehead? I'd have to say the relationships I've been able to build. The travel industry attracts passionate, thoughtful people who really love what they do and I truly enjoy feeding off their energy. In addition to connecting with so many travel agency executives, I've been able to connect with the real workers of this industry – the front line travel agent – through my Facebook page (@princessvpsales). That channel has enabled me to really engage with and learn from the people who actually sell Princess & Cunard each day. I also enjoy attending the various conferences throughout the year, especially when they're being hosted on other cruise brands so I can steal the silverware.

Although I have severe stage fright and hate being the center of attention, I'm learning to get used to it.

**What trends are you seeing in the business?**

For such a mature business (Princess is turning 54 this year!), it's amazing how much growth we see each year. Princess alone has five ships on order over the next six years, more than any other premium brand. Next year will bring 24 new ships to the industry across all the different segments! That means we need the continued support of Travel Agents – perhaps now more than ever. In terms of the innovation in the industry, it never ceases to amaze me. At Princess, our focus is on MedallionClass – which is harnessing the power of cutting-edge technology to deliver a more personalized, immersive experience. People have limited vacation time and thanks to MedallionClass they get to spend even more time enjoying themselves.

## **What advice would you give to a travel agent who aspires to sell premium cruises and suite categories?**

First, get educated on the brand through our Princess Academy (award-winning online training program). You sell best what you know. Building your client base can take time, but your absolute best resource for new clients will always be your existing clients. Referrals are the NUMBER ONE source of trusted information people use to make a buying decision, so tap into who you have – even if it's only one client! Then, learn to sell without considering your own wallet. If you can't personally afford a suite, don't think your clients can't! Establish their budget parameters but then work with them to ensure they understand the difference in going from a balcony cabin to a mini-suite and then to a suite. Break it down on a per person, per day basis. Yes, that's called upselling, but your job is to ensure they have the best possible vacation, not to save a few dollars.

## **What are a few of the characteristics of Princess Cruises' most valuable agents in terms of sales productivity?**

Those who have become a Commodore in our Princess Academy. Those who connect with their local BDM (Business Development Manager). Those who have sailed with us so they fully understand the product and can ensure they answer all of the questions their client might have. Those who follow me on **Facebook** (<https://www.facebook.com/PrincessVPSales/>)! Those who take advantage of our best-in-class group program. Those who know how to sell an Alaska Cruisetour. If you're not explaining to your clients the upgraded experience you get going to Alaska with Princess and taking a Cruisetour, you're not only missing out on extra commission, but more importantly, your client is missing out on a better experience! Did I mention following me on **Facebook** (<https://www.facebook.com/PrincessVPSales/>)??

## **What gives you the greatest professional satisfaction?**

Talking with Travel Agents who approach me at a conference and say with a smile how much they love their Princess/Cunard BDM (Business Development Manager). This is a relationship business and to hear them speak so highly of someone on my team is what it's all about. I also love it when I'm standing with my counterparts from Carnival Corporation (Eva from HAL, Adolfo from CCL, etc.) and the Travel Agent asks to take a picture with me...but not anyone else. Not that I'm competitive, but that always cracks me up.

## **Now for a little fun... what has been your most memorable personal cruise experience?**

Watching my twin boys grow up through cruising. They are about to turn 13 (ugh) but their first cruise was when they had just turned 3. From that first Caribbean cruise to now, they've been to Hawaii, Alaska, California Coast, Caribbean (four more times!), Japan and even French Polynesia – twice! To say they're spoiled is an understatement. But the exposure they've had to different cultures (especially the food) and just being able to have a civilized dining experience without being glued to a smartphone has been priceless. Going back to before we had kids (aka the good ol' days!), standing on the bridge of Grand Princess and sailing the Bosphorus Strait, passing the Blue Mosque and Hagia Sophia on our way into Istanbul was pretty spectacular. Sailing out of Bora Bora isn't so bad either! Or into Venice...

