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Customers asked for green ratings - Thursday, March 25, 2010

By Chris Gray

A London travel agent has started quizzing her customers about the sustainability of their holidays after she had a “Green Makeover” from the **Travel Foundation**.

Karen Simmonds has also started a loyalty programme giving her customers “green points” that can be redeemed at an online shop selling sustainable products.

Travel Matters managing director Simmonds won the makeover in a TTG competition with the Travel Foundation last year when the charity started its consultancy service.

Julie Middleton, Travel Foundation industry programmes manager, visited Simmonds to assess the sustainability of her shop and give advice about how to improve her record and get customers involved.

Simmonds was already promoting ethical tourism and had signed up to **TravelPledge**, in which agents can support their own project in destinations.

But she said the Travel Foundation makeover showed her how she could do more to communicate what her agency was doing to customers.

"The assessment was quite time consuming but it helped me look at the bigger picture and think about what we do with customers," she said.

Simmonds is now giving questionnaires to customers asking them to rate their resorts on sustainability, and will use the results to help future customers.

The assessment also led to Simmonds joining the "Green Rewards" scheme in which customers are given points to redeem at the greenrewards.co.uk website.

Simmonds said the points were replacing restaurant vouchers and other benefits she had previously given customers to encourage loyalty.

Middleton said the consultancy service aimed to give agents and operators a bespoke assessment of how they could embrace environmentally and socially responsible travel.

"The scope ranges from advice about water and energy saving in the office, which can help make savings on the bottom line, through to talking to customers about what sustainable travel means in a simple, meaningful way," she said.