

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP SPONSORED BY DEEM

Corporate Travel Has Changed. Is Your Online Booking System Keeping Up?

By Cheryl Rosen | Mar 02, 2022



Travel managers are on the hunt for corporate travel booking systems that balance mobility and connectivity for travelers with corporate sustainability and inclusion goals.

Last year, in the heart of the pandemic, Snap Inc. was looking at ways to incorporate health and safety information on hotels into its corporate booking system. With 6,000 employees and a pre-pandemic air spend of about \$25 million, travel manager Sean Parham soon was on the hunt for a better booking system – but he found that his list of requirements just kept growing. The corporate sustainability team wanted a system that would yield a smaller carbon footprint; others wanted to add more minority-owned businesses and suppliers who used them.

“The way to move the needle on achieving corporate goals is not to look at the data after trips are done, but to provide the information people need to make the right decisions when they are in the booking process,” Parham says. “Sustainability is very important to us as a

company; it's a huge piece of what we're doing. We're very excited that there are booking systems that can help our travelers make some wise decisions, that can ask if they really need to take that day trip to San Francisco. Is it worth the carbon?"

Snap is not alone in its quest for a program with less impact on Planet Earth. Carlson Travel Network, for example, last month named "sustainable travel initiatives" as the top goal of the \$100 million investment it will be making in its technology platform.

Sustainable Travel Is the New Normal

Indeed, "the future of travel is changing," Google Travel's head of industry Matt Rogers said at the US Tour Operators Association (USTOA) annual conference in November. "Travel is becoming more sustainable, more meaningful, and more inclusive." And Holland America Group executive VP Charlie Ball noted that as foreign ports reopen to travel, "we need to be welcomed into our partner communities. We feel passionate that as [travel] builds back up, we do it in a way that's more sustainable. That idea used to be difficult to sell to customers — but now it's a more foundational thought process. Companies are figuring out ways to measure sustainability. And even aside from the consumer benefit, there is no stronger way to make yourself an employer of choice than to let your employees know they will be rewarded for coming up with ways to improve sustainability."

In a survey distributed at the USTOA conference, 84 percent of respondents said sustainability is an "important" or "somewhat important" goal to their customers. And in an Accenture study, 73 percent of executives identified "becoming a truly sustainable and responsible business" as a top priority for their organization during the next three years.

Accessibility and Inclusion Are Priorities, Too

While sustainability has drawn the interest of everyone from Wall Street investors to corporate boards, today's travel booking system RFPs have other new questions as well. Many ask whether the content is accessible to users with disabilities, and about the possibility of adding accessibility and inclusion information on suppliers, such as whether they are, or use the services of, minority-owned businesses.

At Ovation Travel in New York, EVP Michael Steiner noted that "we've certainly seen an interest in discussing how to adjust travel policies around sustainability and around travelers who have different types of physical needs — and that includes the use of online tools and how to preference certain suppliers. Some are looking for an online booking tool that can display not only the carriers that offer the best price and best time, but also the least emissions possible, or information on how accessible hotels and airlines are."

At Snap, too, "We also want to look at what the airlines are doing in the DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) space," Parham says. "These are not the only things we are looking for, but it's a definite plus to have them."

In the end, though, his top priority is to find a booking system that makes life easier for his travelers — and that they will be happy to use. It needs to be quick and intuitive, “built for the phone and not the desktop,” with screens that are easy to swipe through and artificial intelligence similar to Amazon’s, that tracks a buyer’s preferences and anticipates what they need and want to buy.

Corporate Platform Designers Keep Consumers in Mind

No matter what your corporate goals, though, mobility and connectivity are the real keys to winning over corporate travelers utilizing an online booking platform, says Nikolaj Koster, head of mobility at Deem. Consumers are accustomed to purchasing from successful sites like Amazon, Netflix and even Uber, and that high level of clientele satisfaction should translate to a corporate site as well.



Nikolaj Koster, Head of Mobility, Deem

“In the consumer world there’s a lot of happiness around online purchasing; ask anyone for a great tool and they can easily name five that are rated 4.9 or 5 in the App store,” he says. “But there are no extraordinarily great tools in the corporate travel world.” The push is on to “learn from the consumer tools and make corporate tools just as easy and delightful.”

For example, on expense reports, the highest number of transactions involve ground mobility: black cars, car rentals, bikes, rail, public transit. What if, in addition to adding data on sustainability and inclusiveness, your booking system also searched out the most efficient ground transportation and highlighted the best options? This exact functionality is in a development phase by Deem on its platform and will enable corporate travelers to focus more easily on their clients, Koster says, and accomplish their business goals.

About Deem and Etta

Deem is on a mission to transform travel. Starring Etta, its award-winning, mobile-first, corporate travel booking and management software, Deem offers employees everything they need to easily make the right travel decisions for themselves and their company.

Etta’s intelligent features make travel seamless — travelers can book or modify anything themselves from any device. Its robust suite of features, including faster and broader

searches, global reach, and single site building capability, empower both travelers and travel managers.

Safety? Check! Travel SafetyCheck is the award-winning solution to help travelers with safety and wellness information right in the booking flow, where it's needed most. This powerful feature in Etta offers data on cleaning protocols, airline requirements, and hotel neighborhood details including nighttime safety, LGBTQ+ and women's safety, and basic freedom scores.

Deem is also committed to accessibility as part of its DEI efforts. So, Etta is compliant with AA-level guidelines for accessibility features from the W3C. It's the right thing to do. And accessibility features help everyone travel better, not just people with disabilities.

While the Etta business travel management software is always evolving, its latest first-of-its-kind feature is Uber for Business integration. Etta will remind travelers to reserve their ride in advance of their trip directly in platform. Now travelers can rely on technology to streamline their booking process, and travel managers get greater insight into employees' mobility needs and spending throughout their trip.

Deem's travel technology plugs into major travel agencies and expense solution providers, empowering more corporate customers and the world's largest travel management companies. With Etta, employees get an effortless and intuitive experience, and travel managers get improved adoption and controlled spending. Finally, it's easier to travel anywhere.

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