

TRAVEL BOOKING TRENDS: TECHNOLOGY YOUR BUSINESS TRAVELERS WANT TO USE

AMY MUTSCHER

Today's traveler has a huge assortment of apps, websites and tools available to research, book and track business travel. According to the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA), most business users are going directly to the airline and hotel apps on their itinerary with some use of third-party booking tools. Some of the newest technologies in the industry - Lyft, Uber and Airbnb - are quickly establishing themselves as major players.

These methods of booking travel may be easy for your employees to use, but there's a cost to travel managers who need to track spending and monitor adherence to the travel policy. When your employees book travel directly with a provider, your company loses the opportunity to leverage your travel budget into bargaining power and gain visibility into which suppliers they're using.

What's going on in the business travel technology space? Can you implement tools that your employees like to use that also track expenses and monitor which suppliers are booked, all while consistently offering quality customer service? Let's take a look at the latest trends to find out.

Sharing Economy

The advent of the 'sharing economy' has skyrocketed Airbnb, Uber and other on-demand services to unforeseen ubiquity. A 2017 study by Certify, a provider of travel and expense software for companies, found that 6% of all business travel transactions in 2016 were with Uber, making the ridesharing company the most common expense, in terms of transactions. Uber's top competitor, Lyft, is making inroads into the business travel marketplace. It's challenging Uber's auto-expense feature by partnering with expense management firms to send your receipt directly to your personal travel and expense report. The Airbnb for Business program promises to 'make it easy to travel for work without sacrificing the comforts of home.' The Airbnb business travel product offers customers quality wifi, 24-hour check-in and direct expensing to your company. Does your company have a policy or guidelines for using these tools?

Can you implement tools that your employees like to use that also track expenses and monitor which suppliers are booked, all while consistently offering quality customer service?

Virtual Payments

Virtual payments are another cutting-edge technology being adopted by business travelers. Although corporate cards remain prevalent, the availability and usage of virtual payments are on a steep increase. An important consideration is that today's millennials may not have access to credit due to huge student loan burdens and no rental history. For this sector of employees, virtual payments offer ease and convenience and no awkward conversations with their travel manager about how soon the expense report will be paid.

Mobile Tools

For Millennials, as well as many Gen Xers and Boomers, the mobile phone is their single most important possession; they spend an average of 174 minutes a day on the device! For international business travelers, their mobile device functions as both a booking tool solving the logistical issues of itinerary changes, while also providing opt-in travel alert texts. Generally, most travelers would benefit from a mobile solution with the ability to identify weather or other factors that would affect their trip and then offer real-time rebooking. In the near term, many companies are exploring the use of a GPS tracking tool to locate employees on a business trip in case of unexpected complications.

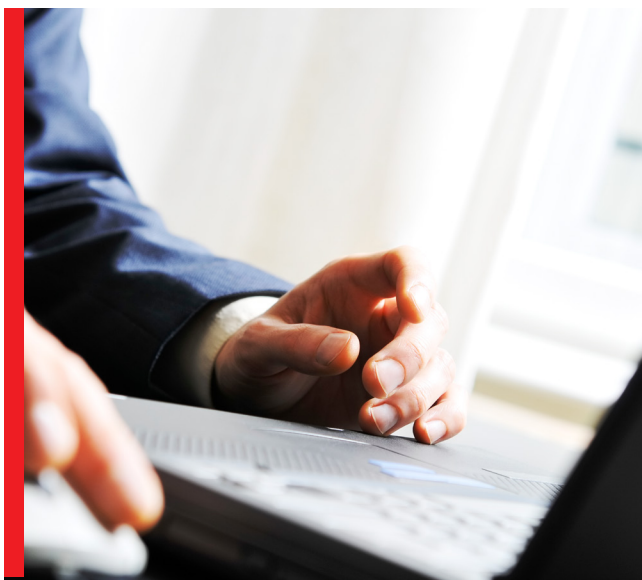


Making Technology Work for Travelers AND Your Company

By allowing individual trips to be booked on proprietary airline, hotel and car rental websites, your company loses an important cost savings benchmark: the total spend. You may be able to leverage your combined buying power by using a common booking portal, some are even mobile. When all your travelers are using a travel management system, it's easier to track expenditures, target savings and deliver real ROI on your travel spend. Many airlines offer 'soft dollar' programs that provide in-kind benefits in exchange for your company's airfare spending. Soft dollar incentives may include airline tickets, waived baggage fees, upgrades, status match and club passes.

Putting it all Together

Bringing your travel spending under a single umbrella has a number of advantages, but implementing a new technology can be fraught with complications. If your booking tool isn't helpful and intuitive, your travelers won't use it. Unless your staff understands the overall benefit, it can be a tough adjustment. Training sessions and a walk-through video to introduce its advantages can help with the rollout. The idea is to reinforce that employees using a booking portal is good for the company, and helpful for them too. And, travelers will still be able to get the benefits of loyalty and rewards programs and accrue frequent flyer miles using the new booking tool.



Many business travelers would prefer to try an easy shortcut or a familiar tool instead of using a business travel booking portal. Most corporate booking tools don't offer the personalization and efficient experience of top travel apps and websites, but the benefits of consolidated bookings outweigh the value of a preferable user experience. Booking with a corporate portal will provide the same results, especially when they can often go back and make adjustments like a seat change, upgrade with points, etc.

Your goal should be to find technology solutions that offer the ease of use that your travelers want with the management tools you need in order to monitor bookings and achieve cost savings. You'll get the best of both worlds – easy and intuitive technology with the hidden ability to watch travel spending and track compliance.