

## A CUSTOMIZED APPROACH TO TRAVEL MANAGEMENT FOR SMALL & MEDIUM SIZED BUSINESSES

LISA KAHAN

**T**ravel management is an equal-opportunity business. The same tools that are available to the largest, most sophisticated companies are also available to the smallest. That's good news for small and medium-sized businesses that need help managing their travel program. And contrary to common belief, travel management is not a one-size-fits-all solution. The right travel management company works in partnership with their clients to develop tools and services that meet their individual needs.

How do you know when your company is ready to talk to a travel management company? The answer is usually pretty straightforward, and it's not a matter of size or spend. You should start a conversation when you feel there is a lack of visibility into your travel expenses or when some level of management is required to keep your travelers safe and happy on the road.

### Consider these questions:

- Would you like better visibility into your corporate travel expenses?
- Are you able to ensure the safety of your travelers? In case of a crisis, could you verify their whereabouts or ensure the security of your corporate assets? Do they know who to contact in case of an emergency?
- Are you confident your travelers are making smart choices with their bookings?
- Do you have a travel policy in place, and if so, do your travelers comply?
- Do you collect the necessary data to negotiate discounts with suppliers?
- Would you like to integrate booking, authorizations and payments into one streamlined process?



## Define the Support Amount You Need

Generally speaking, travel management companies describe the level of support and service a client requires as lightly, moderately or heavily managed. Are the constant last-minute itinerary changes of a few travelers eating up your time? A lightly managed solution might be subscribing to an online booking system that allows your travelers to make itinerary changes via text. Whereas an example of a more heavily managed program would be the integration of travel policy directives into an online booking system.

## How Do You Know What Is Right for Your Company?

That depends on your goals and priorities. Travel Leaders Group recommends companies start by developing an effective travel policy. This go-to document for all things travel is the bedrock of any travel program and usually guides all subsequent decisions. You should have a travel policy in place whether or not you use the services of a travel management partner, as a well-considered travel policy has the potential for significant cost savings and allows you to rest easy knowing your travelers are safe while on the road.

## Laying the Groundwork: Processes and People Matter

For many clients, the next step is getting the right tools and processes in place. Depending on your needs, these can include online booking tools, negotiating discounts with air, hotel and car vendors, rolling out automatic expense reporting and enrolling in airline soft dollar programs that offer frequent fliers benefits such as seat upgrades, lounge passes and discounted tickets. These initial steps are part of a lightly managed program and have the potential for immediate savings and increased control. They will also bring visibility to your travel spending, increase budget accuracy and lay the groundwork for better data collection and analysis.

Would you like better visibility into your corporate travel expenses?



## Adding More Insight and Control

A moderately managed program builds on these services and might include risk management, in-depth data analysis and more robust supplier negotiations. From there, some clients develop into a highly managed program, where they have a great deal of control over their employees' booking choices, increased strategic account management, and a more sophisticated risk management program. These programs are typically complex and involve a marked increase in oversight.

## Continuous Improvement

Travel management is generally thought of as a process that is constantly evolving to seek better results. As your company grows and matures, so should your travel management program. It's important to remember that the terms lightly, moderately and heavily managed are generalized guidelines, not rigidly defined categories. What's most important is to determine your company's priorities and find a travel management company that will work with you to develop a program customized to your needs.

The good news for small and medium-sized businesses is that you can reap many of the same efficiencies and cost-savings benefits as a large company, even through a lightly managed program.

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