For more in this three-part global travel management series from Radius Travel and The BTN Group, visit **www.radiustravel.com**.

MANAGING GLOBAL TRAVEL 301: ADVANCED STRATEGIES

While optimization efforts are ongoing for any global travel program, a mature, well-structured global travel operation enjoys a broad level of trust in its local markets. That said, maturity comes with its own challenges.

Like all travel programs, global programs are affected by consumer travel influences, the advancement of mobile technologies and the specter of increasingly fragmented distribution channels and booking behaviors. The difference is that managing these issues on a global scale becomes more complex, with additional considerations in specific markets, but also with concerns about how to apply advanced strategies and innovation to global policy and processes.

FOCUS ON BIG DATA

Big data has become a buzzword—not only in the corporate travel world, but also across nearly all commercial interests. To the managed travel space in particular, big data presents attractive opportunities:

- Managing new travel spend categories
- Using predictive analysis to tailor content choices based on past trips or demonstrated traveler preferences
- Creating traveler engagement strategies
- Managing travelers or enforcing policy en route
- Increasing the effectiveness of traveler safety and security efforts

All of these areas require a better understanding of traveler behaviors before and after a business trip, as well as getting more insights into traveler location and purchases while on the road. But particularly with travel management on a global scale, diverse data privacy regulations may stand in the way of executing against these more innovation-minded strategies on a large scale.

Europe is the current hotbed of data privacy legislation, restricting the exchange of data across borders and requiring corporations to mask certain types of data so that details cannot be traced back to individual employees. When it comes to travel management, it is critical to share data—at minimum—with agency and security partners, and to garner traveler opt-in to do so, as prescribed by local law.

This could mean soliciting opt-ins from individual travelers or negotiating with local workers councils to agree to data sharing that will support employees during travel disruption or in a crisis. Establishing a quality travel program and earning high levels of trust from travelers should ease the way for essential data sharing strategies. It is a question, however, whether local markets will opt to share data in an effort to support initiatives aimed at creating more personalized travel programs. As travel management moves toward stronger traveler engagement and predictive analysis strategies, local market tolerance for data sharing may soon be tested.

FRAGMENTED CONTENT & OPEN BOOKING

While disparate content seems to be a new—or rapidly increasing—challenge for domestic programs, fragmentation is a commonly expected issue for global travel programs. A robust effort to aggregate international and local content providers at the travel management company (TMC) level and within the chosen online booking tool(s) (OBTs) is the first step

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toward scaling this challenge. Still, travel managers and travelers alike continue to ask about instances in which they can "find it cheaper on the web".

From the TMC point of view, the question continues to be opaque when it comes to the product or terms associated with the purchase. For example, is the buyer comparing apples to apples when it comes to seat-class, refund or change eligibility, type of hotel room, bundled services, etc.? A close review of the terms of purchase may reveal product and services discrepancies of which the traveler was not aware. It should be acknowledged, however, that TMC content, if driven by the GDS, is not infallible, and a progressive TMC should work with client corporations to identify alternative content strategies. While that work in is progress, the TMC may include a price match within the service level agreement (SLA) to combat perception issues.

Some companies are looking at open booking strategies to bridge content gaps—allowing travelers to book off-channel should they find itineraries that beat TMC or OBT pricing by a defined margin. Other companies are considering open booking as one way to shore up hotel programs, which are widely acknowledged as one of the most difficult categories to manage given the number of hotels that do not distribute through GDS providers, especially in markets outside of North America.

Open booking tools, utilizing email parsing technologies, are able to capture certain elements of data from email confirmations that are forwarded (often manually) to a TMC partner. Through use of passive segments, TMCs are working on strategies for serving and changing these itineraries, but the path to fully supporting open bookings is not yet paved. The upside is that open booking seems to be able to supplement data that might otherwise be lost—and there is potential for the TMC to integrate that data into overall reporting. The downside, however, is that an open booking policy—even when it is limited—may signal to the travel population at large that they have the nod to book outside the program. That is a difficult risk, particularly for global programs that have to work harder to win compliance in some markets.

LEVERAGING MOBILE & SOCIAL TRAVEL TOOLS

Business travelers continuously report that access to information via smartphone and tablet is critical to their business travel. That includes access to emails, text messaging and social media to stay connected to the office and family, but they also value the multitudes of mobile apps available to support business travel activities.

Indeed, the promise around mobile tools for managed travel has been building for several years. Yet, professionals who manage those travelers consistently report that their mobile travel strategies are insufficient and there is need for swift development. As the dominant players in the smartphone and tablet landscape have begun to emerge—namely, Android and Apple—the complexity of implementing a strategy around mobile travel tools and connectivity becomes more manageable.

From the perspective of itinerary management and travel alerts, progressive TMCs have done a good job serving travel information and mobile boarding passes to mobile devices. A critical area of development for both corporations and TMCs is how to serve local market information via mobile tools—particularly for international travelers in unfamiliar cities. There are numerous apps ready to fill the void, but what business travelers need is targeted information that will help them accomplish their business goals easily.

Some companies have enlisted their traveler communities to contribute to social technology solutions—allowing frequent travelers to specific destinations to contribute tips and support to other travelers. Other corporations and TMCs have invested in mobile messaging solutions that anticipate traveler movements based on itinerary, and push messages about ground transportation, hotel location or special deals to the traveler when it is most relevant to them.

It's safe to say that travelers will continue to seek consumer-oriented apps to support their corporate travel, but identifying a core mobile toolset is a step in the right direction. In the context of a global program, that core toolset could be variable in different markets. Travel managers should be ready to apply learnings from their global travel implementation to inform mobile travel implementation across the program.

LEARN MORE

To find out more about some of the most pressing issues in global travel management, access the **"Global Travel Program Trends to Watch"** resources from Radius Travel and The BTN Group.

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