



By Greeley Koch

Ahead Of The Mobility Curve

Travel managers can lead the transition from Old School to the New “Mobile & Connected” School.

Everyone knows *something* about the travel industry. Among other things, the internet and mobile technology have vastly increased the public availability of travel information. Web sites provide unprecedented transparency into fares and rates. Smartphones serve up travel knowledge that arguably competes with what travel agents can see on their desktop computers from their GDS. When all this is put in the hands of a talented, motivated, and mobile workforce with access to more and increasingly sophisticated technology, seemingly anyone can be a travel manager. For the real travel manager, this can lead to confrontation.

But what happens if we change our mindset about today’s more knowledgeable traveler? Rather than thinking of them as a threat to the travel manager’s role, what if we considered them an ally of the travel program? Instead of fearing that today’s educated traveler wants to become the travel manager, think of them as a participant in the process. The educated traveler wants to be more productive and knows how to use information to remove stress from their road-warrior life and replace it with mobile efficiency. With this view, the travel manager will take the lead and do everything possible to provide travelers with more mobile information. The travel manager must move their travel program from the old-school way of

thinking to the new “mobile and connected” school of thought.

Managing corporate travel today requires a different outlook, skill set, and knowledge base than what was required just a few years ago. The value proposition of managed travel is changing as companies become more virtual. Travel managers must focus on maximizing value in a connected and mobile world.

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Corporate travel management should adapt to this new reality and move beyond a command-and-control mindset, with its ties to a strong travel policy and rigid compliance program. Instead, the new thinking centers on controlling how travelers initiate bookings, but gives them the freedom to manage their trip in a way that best suits their needs. As a travel manager, you can embrace this change and leverage it for your own managed travel program.

Introducing the Virtual Toolbox

In a very short time (years, not decades), we have gone from command-and-control travel polices that locked down what trav-

elers could or couldn’t do on the road to policies that allow a certain latitude to travelers. Initially, we went from having to call a travel agent for every reservation to working with first-generation corporate travel online booking tools that weren’t always user friendly, but lowered costs. From there we progressed to corporate travel online booking tools designed to mimic the experience travelers had when booking personal trips on leisure web sites. Today we are moving into mobile booking apps and virtual communication tools that allow workers to be detached from the office, laptops, and corporate support systems. Employees can be virtually anywhere in the world, but can still conduct business effectively.

Today’s travel manager should be concerned less about making sure their ASA is 80/20 (those of you who have been around a while will know what I mean) and more about making their travel program work in the virtual environment. These days the forward-thinking travel manager is working more closely with the company’s IT group to link the virtual and mobile worker with the support services of the company.

Statistics show, however, that there is still a long way to go before corporate travel managers, IT departments, and companies fully embrace the mobile world. In May 2011, AirPlus International

published research showing that, although mobile travel tools and applications exist for leisure trips, few such solutions target the corporate marketplace. But those wily corporate travelers soon figured out how they could use their personal smartphones

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loaded with leisure travel mobile apps to increase their productivity on corporate trips. Technology companies, both inside and outside the travel industry, recognized this area of opportunity and have started to build applications that support corpo-

rate travel policies and corporate travel booking processes.

The AirPlus survey showed that 90 percent of travelers carry a smartphone, and more travelers are using company-sanctioned smart-phone applications for business. Yet 55 percent of respondents said the corporate travel manager has no responsibility for mobile travel tools or applications. The survey reveals that those involved in selecting mobile travel tools have mainly an advisory role.

Old School vs Mobile School

It concerns me that travel managers are not more actively involved in the usage, oversight, and selection of mobile tools.

Corporate travel managers must drive enhanced programs for the mobile employee. The table below presents some ideas and areas on which travel managers can focus to increase their influence and

enhance their travel programs to benefit mobile travelers. Of course, I could include many more opportunities, but I want to list a few to represent various areas that provide the foundation for a new mobile and connected travel program. All the items on the list have some thing in common; they require corporate travel managers to think beyond merely how travel booking is accomplished, and to integrate themselves more into the company's strategic direction. Right now companies are focusing on how they can:

- Support a new generation of workers used to technology as a means of communication;
- Reduce travel in a ways that don't just cut travel expenses, but offers alternatives to travel;
- Make technology decisions that generate a positive return on investment.

The travel manager is uniquely positioned to provide support in all these

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areas. The corporate travel department is the one group that has the vantage point to pull together all the stakeholders that affect the mobile traveler – business units, IT, HR, procurement, senior leaders, and, of course, travel.

The travel manager must lead the charge and be the first to say that the old school command-and-control way of operating the travel program is over. Travel managers can help focus the company on getting in front of a trend that travelers have already embraced – using smartphone technology and other virtual collaboration tools to make themselves more productive. When you do this, you will have contributed to a higher return on investment for the money spent on travel and technology. And you will elevate your standing within the company and the overall corporate travel profession. But the real bonus points come when your travelers express a newfound respect for you – the travel manager – and for your corporate travel department as a group that is working smarter to make the road warrior's life easier. **BTE**

Old School (The Way We Were)	Today's Mobile & Connected School	What The Travel Manager Can Be Doing
Command and Control Travel Policy	Keep compliance to the booking channel but then have flexible and adjustable travel policies to support the road warrior	Work with stakeholders throughout the company to see where the biggest pain points are with the policy and adjust as needed
Booking online and calling an agent	Using mobile booking tools in addition to booking online and calling an agent	Understand what mobile booking tools are available that support the corporate travel program
Usage of leisure travel applications on smartphones	Usage of preferred supplier applications to access your corporate travel programs	Work with your preferred suppliers to allow your company programs to be accessible through the supplier's smartphone apps
Having corporate travel information only accessible on an intranet web site	Company-developed smartphone applications that access the corporate travel program, policies, and information	Work with the company's IT group to build company specific smartphone applications
Run reports after a natural disaster or travel disruption to find out who was in the area and wait for travelers to check in	Real time smartphone messaging and responses targeted toward individuals affected by events	Work with suppliers to understand available technology
Encourage travel as the only way to be successful in the company	Offer alternatives to travel that better support outcomes needed from meetings	Become the knowledge expert on mobility, virtual collaboration, and how your department can actually focus on reducing travel in a way that offers alternatives