



## SupplySide

# Taking Advantage of Online Booking

Seven sound reasons for travel managers to embrace web-based tools

By Michael MacNair

Still on the fence about online booking? Travel managers who have been standing on the sidelines — or who have installed a product but failed to fully implement it — should have another look.

Online booking has matured over the past few years. Consumer products and their corporate cousins have focused on certain client niches (individuals, small companies, global organizations, etc.), and the result is improved efficiency and productivity.

At the same time, travel management companies have evolved to actively support online booking.

### Your gains

Following are the key advantages of online booking.

- **Price.** GetThere, an online booking provider, claims its customers save 14 percent on airfare (about \$100 per online booking) when they use the tool rather than full-service booking options. Why? Travelers see more options in a shorter amount of time than they can learn about through an agent (or by looking through multiple sites themselves).

Travelers also can be visu-

ally directed to low-cost choices preferred by their employer. Picking an option after scrolling through the possibilities (as opposed to simply booking a frequent-flyer flight of choice)

is the result of what is called “visual guilt,” and it drives down overall travel spend.

In addition, most corporate sites have enhanced their search capabilities outside of GDS fares, presenting a wider range of low-cost carrier and web options. This one-stop shopping further reduces airfares and even lowers agency fees.

- **Productivity.** Change management is more easily facilitated via online tools than ever before. Exchanges and refunds can be processed online, and service support options are numerous. The process of looking, booking, changing and processing travel can be streamlined with quality automation.

- **Policy enforcement.** The process of programming an enforceable travel policy into a booking tool, and having reservations outside of policy authorized (or squashed)



quickly and efficiently, is easier today than ever before. The key to savings is the policy itself, but automation that polices policy and requires authorization provides amazing results.

- **Planning.** Frequent-trip templates, downloadable itineraries, tools to allow schedulers to share options easily with travelers, 24/7 access to data, useful user interfaces that deliver quick and efficient data, scheduler and guest access, previous trip tracking, seat-selection maps, and other features provide great value to travelers and schedulers alike.

- **Preferences.** These systems collect a tremendous depth of data on traveler and company preferences and ensure the application of such requirements. They transmit data to suppliers and build confidence with travelers that their requests have been respected.

- **Procedures.** Sites can be customized to verify customer/department/client codes,

document lowest fare offered vs. the fare selected, push preferred suppliers, show office locations compared to hotel availability or even verify “Fly America Act” compliance.

- **Problems.** The service platforms that support online booking tools have become more sophisticated. Depending on your needs and budget, you can talk to support personnel in India, in a U.S. call center, or in a small group in your neighborhood when you want and where you want.

### Progress report

Achieving high adoption of online booking has been a challenge for some companies, but with the support available from a wider range of TMCs and a more user-friendly online experience, businesses of all sizes are starting to realize greater value and savings. (To learn how Federated Department Stores achieved 90 percent compliance, see page 45.)

Clearly, the time to wait for online booking to come of age has passed. These are mature times for this valuable technology. □

**Michael MacNair** is president and CEO of MacNair Travel Management Inc. ([www.macnairtravel.com](http://www.macnairtravel.com)), headquartered in Alexandria, Va.