

Mobile Use Pushes Adoption

By Seth Harris

Following the transition to a new online booking tool last year, The Advisory Board Co.'s managing director of information systems and travel buyer Steven Mandelbaum integrated the technology into employee workflow processes, allowing online booking to synchronize with travelers' calendars and providing travelers with online travel service applications for their handheld mobile devices. The mobile travel technology helped drive online booking adoption and compliance, lowering travel costs significantly without reducing trips or changing policy.

Since deploying the Rearden Commerce Personal Assistant in July 2008, the Washington, D.C.-based health-care consulting company has increased its online booking adoption from 76 percent to 96 percent. It also achieved a 90 percent rate of preferred supplier compliance. Both improvements were achieved without a mandate.

By providing new communication channels and integrating what was seen internally as a cumbersome online booking process into travelers' phones and calendars, The Advisory Board reduced travel expenditures by 20 percent.

"Don't make them learn arcane policy," said Mandelbaum, who drew on his technology development and management information system background. "Don't make them go to systems that don't work with them. Integrate it with systems that they currently use. The key to getting any type of compliance is giving them things that will make their job easier and things that they want so there's no reason to go outside the system."

The company spent \$25 million on travel in 2008, including \$10 million in airfare. Most of the trips are domestic, multi-segment itineraries, often to hospitals and medical facilities outside of major cities that require more complex travel reservations.

Mandelbaum promoted the Rearden mobile application to its BlackBerry users, about one-quarter of the workforce and 45 percent of frequent travelers. As of this summer, about 150 frequent travelers downloaded the application. He expected that number to grow as the application becomes available for more mobile operating systems. Rearden released an application for the Apple iPhone in August.

A key to driving compliance was opening up network security walls to allow exchange server calendar integration with online bookings, which can synch down to all of the employee's systems and devices, said Mandelbaum.

"People live on their BlackBerrys, their iPhones and different devices," he said. "When they are on the road, they don't have time to sit at computers or turn on their laptops, they have to keep going."

Now, Mandelbaum is taking his philosophy of integrating travel compliance into workflow processes and his innovative nature even further. The Advisory Board is working with a third-party technology company to develop an itinerary planning and booking tool that builds reservation options by importing schedules and client meeting destinations from its customer relationship management system.

The system, which Mandelbaum plans to launch internally in the next six months, accounts for drive times to a destination from the closest airport, alternative airports, expected hotel nights, and expected time lost using connections.

It also uses algorithms and employee input to take the value of travelers' time into the reservation process and offer alternatives around travelers' schedules and work pro-

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THE ADVISORY BOARD CO.



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ductivity requirements. After the system uses all the weights and measures of time and cost, it then offers the traveler several itinerary options. Mandelbaum said the reservation ultimately would link into the Rearden Personal Assistant for calendar integration and data reporting.

Mandelbaum said the product development work is being shared, and he is doing some of it himself because he expects it to yield cheaper airfare. For example, "instead of someone flying into Des Moines, they'll fly into Omaha, which has more competing service." ♦