



How to Stay on the Right Side of Your Business Travellers

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Introduction

If you could be granted one magical power, what would it be? Super-human strength? The ability to fly?

As a travel manager, there's a strong chance your ideal magical power would be the ability to get inside the minds of your business travellers.

What's going on in there?

We seem to have reached a tipping point where the rising expectations of business travellers conflict with traditional travel programs. They want freedom, while travel managers expect to have ultimate control. But the world is changing.

You've probably already moved from a sea of paper expense claims to digital travel receipts, but that seems rather insignificant when compared to voice-based search, virtual reality and machine learning - technologies that are all tipped to become the next frontiers in travel.

Research company Gartner predicts that by 2020, customers will manage **85% of their business relationships without interacting with a human**. Therefore, if you think your role as a travel manager has changed significantly already, there's still a long way to go.

The modern travel manager needs to take everything in their stride. And that's not easy, with an increasingly consumer-driven culture, data fragmentation, new supplier models and fantastical travel tech all joining duty of care as the hot agenda.

So, how can you continue to deliver a positive experience for your travellers while embracing these changes to your role? How do you perform the magic trick of getting into their mind and staying on their side?

Does the business travel industry need to reinvent itself altogether? Are you going to wait and follow the trend? Or are you going to lead the way forward?

In this ebook, we're going to explore the following -

- How to stay on the right side of your business travellers
- Why you may need to tackle open bookings, not ignore them
- The increasing prevalence of the inner consumer in business
- The changing technology landscape and what you need to know
- How to work with travellers rather than battle against them
- How to plan for the future of business travel



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2

The Inner Consumer

Part of your job as a travel manager is to keep up with changing behaviours. To stay on the right side of the business traveller and ensure their satisfaction, you need to understand exactly what they're looking for by channeling their inner consumer.

“Online travel is going to feel like a dial phone very soon.”

- Jay S Walker, founder of Priceline

The on-demand economy is thriving. Companies such as Uber, who can satisfy consumer-desire for speed and simplicity (and reportedly a big reason people like Uber can do this is because consumers don't have to speak to anyone in order to make a booking), are monopolising their industries and shaping our buying behaviour.

The expectations and demands we make of business systems and technologies is being shaped by our experiences as consumers with Amazon, our online banking, social media and our favourite apps. We're bringing the same expectations and demands to the workplace.

We're bringing our inner consumer to work.

But should that inner consumer be allowed to make an appearance in the workplace, or would chaos simply ensue?

Out with the old?

Traditional travel programmes and natural consumer-driven behaviour simply don't mix very well. This is why we've seen business travellers regularly venturing outside of the policy and booking their travel arrangements via means that are convenient to them.

If you spot a business traveller managing her flight on a smartphone app that isn't mentioned in the travel policy, do you stamp it out? Or are you more inclined to grant her freedom of choice and the ability to act like a consumer?

Clearly, travel policies need to be adjusted in order to embrace the behaviour of the modern business traveller.

The dominance of mobile

At the [Skift Global forum](#), Booking.com CEO Gillian Tan told those in attendance how she expected 50% of bookings to be soon placed on mobile devices. That implies such behaviour is becoming intrinsic and it's therefore highly likely that business travellers will automatically reach for their smartphones when booking a trip.

It's vital that employees don't feel their inner consumer is prohibited from making an appearance in the workplace. When they arrive at the office, do you want them to feel like they've somehow travelled back in time, or allow their natural buying habits to flourish?

"We're used to Amazon and Google suggesting products to us. Soon this kind of predictive software will be putting together detailed and tailored travel experiences, like our own top-end digital travel broker."
- Martin Raymond, Co-Founder, The Future Laboratory

No two travellers are the same

So, how do you ensure employees can buy and arrange their business travel in the same way they'd book a trip outside of work without the rulebook being tossed out of the window?

A good place to start is to appreciate how individual each and every one of your travellers is. You can't lump them together and expect them all to want the same thing from their business trip.

In truth, the future is more about personalisation and personalised experiences. What works for one traveller might not suit another. One might want to stay in a boutique family-feel hotel, whereas another may prefer to stay in a chain-formula hotel. It's these types of details that the consumer of today is used to having complete control over.

And they're demanding to be listened to, or threatening to go self-service if they don't get what they want.

The millennial traveller

By 2025, it's predicted that 3 out of 4 employees will be from the millennial generation (which stands to reason - it's the biggest ever). What does this mean for travel management?

Do you feel confident that your travel programme meets their requirements?

Millennials love to mix business and pleasure, which has given rise to the 'bleisure' trip, where employees combine commercial travel with leisure activities. [Research](#) carried out by Bridgestreet Global Hospitality discovered that six out of ten travellers are more likely to take a bleisure trip today than they were five years ago.

It's also believed that [72% of business travellers](#) bolt leisure days on to business trips and that 89% of organisations allow this style of travel.

These findings highlight the progressive attitude of the millennial worker and how their attitudes towards flexible working and modern travel are inspiring older generations, but they also raise some troubling questions for travel managers.

Would you feel comfortable including personal use of a rental car to explore the city at the end of a business trip? Or should they pay for the excess with their own money?

The answer lies in the culture of your business. If it wants to appease the bright millennials of the future, then you will need to embrace and lead the way for a more relaxed programme that puts the traveller first.

Making business travellers feel at home

If your travel programme is too strict to allow business travellers the flexibility to tailor a trip to their needs and desires, then you could wind up with some very frustrated employees.

For example, if you work for a tech company with a young employee demographic, you should probably create a travel programme that aligns with their technology habits and buying preferences. If you want to engage them, you have to make them feel at home.

Maintaining control

The idea of allowing the business traveller's inner consumer to dictate the way travel arrangements are booked may sound like a disaster waiting to happen, but there is a way travel managers can maintain control.

If you can offer a travel programme that mimics consumer models, and allows travellers to book in whichever way they prefer, as long as data flows back into a managed travel system, you can ensure that the safety standards of the business are still met and volume for supplier negotiations captured.

Providing you can capture the data that results from a consumer-driven business trip booking, it shouldn't matter who's in charge of the buying process. And that doesn't mean you'll end up setting a travel policy where everyone books themselves; on the contrary, many employees would rather leave the hard work to the travel organiser.

Channelling the inner consumer is all about providing employees with flexibility and choice. The more you do that, the more you'll see the positive effect you can have as a travel manager. Your influence on staff satisfaction, talent recruitment and employee retention will demonstrate just how much value you can bring to an organisation.



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Why you should work with travellers, rather than battle against them

Should the policies you have and the way you buy travel be working for and with the traveller or are you going to spend every working day battling against them?

The relationship between the travel manager and traveller has changed. Certain roles and responsibilities that the former used to be accountable for are now taken care of by new technology.

This is inevitable. As technology develops at an astonishing pace, tasks that aren't benefitted by the intervention of a human being will be left to the bits and bytes of the digital workforce - for travellers and travel managers alike.

No one likes to be challenged or feel as though their job responsibilities are diminishing, but the benefits on offer to travellers in the form of new technology are compelling and, it seems, the only way forward.

This raises an important question: if technology is empowering the business traveller, should you be getting in their way?

The traveller-centric world

By 2020, global futurist Daniel Burrus believes that we'll all have our own personal 'e-agent' that goes everywhere with us, residing on a piece of wearable technology such as a smartwatch.

Alistair Hann, Skyscanner's Chief Technology Officer, predicts that the introduction of e-agents will change not just the way that travellers plan and book, but their experience of the journey itself, too; "Imagine wearing a device that is able to provide a simultaneous verbal translation of what your taxi driver is saying to you in Chinese," he says. "Or a device that is able to translate your restaurant menu from Russian into English in seconds? The possibilities of these technologies are endless. Suddenly, travel will hold no fears."

Clearly, the direction in which travel is headed looks to be fuelled by smart artificial intelligence (AI), personalisation and customer/user experience.

Embracing a policy that allows employees to use their own leisure travel apps is just the beginning of an increasing reliance on personal tech for the business traveller.

Imagine an employee registering to attend a conference and automatically receiving a booked flight with their favourite airline, a room at a hotel conveniently close to the conference venue and a dinner reservation at a restaurant that caters for their dietary preferences (and all within policy guidelines).

This kind of personalisation will foster an increasingly traveller-centric world, but that doesn't mean the travel manager will play a lesser role. In fact, the vast majority of travel managers foresee their role [becoming more strategic in the next three to five years](#) and that means working with travellers to ensure the opportunities offered by modern technology are fully explored.

Arguably, the more data and feedback you have from your business travellers, the better you will be able to dissect their journey and streamline your travel policy in the future.

Embracing the traveller-centric world is important, because conflict doesn't come cheap...

The cost of conflict

According to studies, the average employee spends **2.1 hours every week dealing with conflict**. Across the world that translates into millions of working days being spent every year on conflict within the workplace.

The dominance of technology in business travel has driven a wedge between the travel manager and business traveller. This is where conflict can arise, and as any finance manager will tell you, poorly-managed conflicts have a cost attached to them.

In the US alone, it is estimated that companies collectively lose **\$359 billion every year** just by trying to resolve conflict. Imagine what happens when you replicate its impact across Europe to businesses.

Is enforcing your travel policy really worth that?

Are you an enabler or enforcer?

As a travel manager, it can be alarmingly easy to get caught in a tug of war where the traveller wants the freedom and flexibility to book convenient travel arrangements, but you want to maintain control over your travel policy.

If you don't allow for the self-serving model that the modern business traveller desires, you risk becoming a bottleneck within the organisation.

Do you want to be the travel manager who stops the traveller from booking and staying at their favourite hotel just to save a negligible amount of cost (because the policy says you should)? Or are you able to be strategic with your spending and view business travel as an investment rather than an expense?

Can you justify your decisions in front of your boss?

If you think it's right and it feels right, do it.

Would you want an autonomous experience where you're free to book whatever is most convenient for you? Or would you rather not get involved and keep your fingers crossed under the desk for a good flight time?

The best way for you both to move forward is to work together and find a middle ground where flexibility, common sense and control can all work together in perfect harmony.

Don't battle against your travellers. Work with them.

Should there be a policy or just a guideline - a code of conduct? We trust people with our customers, the service we give them and to negotiate thousands and millions of business value. Isn't it time to relax our travel policy?



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Adjusting the travel policy to embrace the modern business traveller

“Most corporations... have been unsuccessful in driving the desired behaviours. There comes a time when, rather than continuing a losing effort, you have to change the way you play the game.”

– Mike Koetting, Concur

Travel management programmes of the past have traditionally been fairly rigid.

As a travel manager, you know the vendors you work with like the back of your hand and have complete visibility on spending. You also know that the policies to which travellers must adhere are designed to manage the bottom line of the business.

It's simple this way; you have full control and a happy boss.

But does this suit the modern traveller?

The tides have shifted and technology has raised the expectations of business travellers who now desire more freedom and flexibility to book their own travel arrangements.

To become the travel manager of the future, it's important to adapt to these changing consumer behaviours and technological advances.

It may be time to adjust your travel policy to embrace the behaviour of today's business traveller.

The rise of open bookings

Open bookings have long been a topic of debate and a conflict point between the traveller and the travel manager.

Research conducted by PhoCusWright and Business Travel news found that [43% of US travellers will go outside of their company's bookings channel if it's more convenient](#).

Policies that aren't adhered to clearly aren't hitting the spot.

Let's consider Alice in sales, who's going to Paris for an annual conference. She goes every year and stays in a particular hotel with a gorgeous rooftop bar and on site sauna, which is great for her skin. She has a preferred airline, knows what makes a flight good value for money and can even name the best place for mussels, just down the road from the hotel.

Should Alex be empowered to book that exact experience? Or must she instead adhere to a travel policy that was written ten years ago?

There are a number of reasons travellers will want to book outside of the policy, but they usually relate to nothing more than convenience and a desire to travel efficiently.

Business travellers aren't out to cost the company money, either. They'll circumnavigate the policy if they believe they can get a better deal. Indeed, a study by the Global Business Travel Association found that [98% of business travellers believe they can get a better deal](#) for their company when arranging trips outside of their corporate booking channel.

"The industry needs to acknowledge the brutal fact there are real reasons why people are booking outside GDS channels."*

- Patrick Linnihan, Management President at Gant Travel

Regulating an open booking policy

Let's imagine a world where open booking is the industry standard procedure for business travel.

Scary? Not for the modern travel manager.

But what role does the travel manager play in open booking and how can it be regulated? Are they simply stripped of responsibilities or can they find new ways to thrive?

While many businesses are gradually coming around to the advantages of an open booking structure, there are still many that simply won't entertain the idea. The following number among their concerns:

- Inability of travellers to book negotiated rates
- Loss of travel spending data
- Policy compliance
- Safety and security
- Traveller tracking
- Loss of effectiveness in managed travel program

Such concerns are understandable, however a [whitepaper from Concur](#) debunking open booking myths found that new innovative technologies can counter these potential problems.

Can you provide the financial visibility critical to running a successful travel team; ensuring travellers take advantage of established discounts with suppliers?

Can your technology integrate with different booking platforms and the company's in-house travel management system to make sure key booking data is captured, no matter who the buyer happens to be?

Aside from new tech, one thing should never be forgotten: open bookers aren't cowboys or rogue employees intent on squandering company's money. They're simply looking for a better, more convenient way of doing things. If they're empowered to do just that, they'll keep a mindful eye on the travel policy to ensure they're not taking any liberties.

To become a modern travel manager, you'll need to establish ways to control and regulate an open booking policy. Boiled down, that means the introduction of new technology and the acceptance that open booking isn't very scary at all.

Adopting travel policies for the connected

We're living in the age of the always-connected individual.

Travellers have become accustomed to round-the-clock internet connectivity and powerful mobile devices that help raise their productivity and accelerate their business travel.

This reliance on connectivity was neatly illustrated in a 2014 [ipass report](#) which found that 87% of business travellers feel frustrated, annoyed, angry or anxious if they're unable to get online. Similarly, the [GBTA business traveller sentiment index](#) discovered that 78% of travellers expect Wi-Fi wherever they go - including while flying high above the clouds.

This unrelenting desire for connectivity means people are constantly judging their digital experiences. They expect the ease with which virtually anything can be purchased on Amazon to translate to hotel and flight booking. Why? Because, once you've experienced a better or faster way of doing something, you'll never want to be forced to slow down.

The same level of dependence is placed on devices. Who needs to call the services of a concierge when you can simply use an app to discover the best local restaurants? Who wants to go to the trouble of printing out boarding passes when you can simply swipe your smartphone or smartwatch at the point of boarding? Why should you have to collect a hotel room key when your smartphone can do the job far more conveniently?

Your internal travel programme will quickly look out of place if it's unable to meet the demands of the modern traveller. To stay on side of those travelling for business, the policy will need to take advantage of modern systems and empower staff to use apps that are proven to save time and create a far more efficient travel experience.

It's imperative that your travel policy isn't fighting against the inevitable change in the way travellers use their mobile devices.

Do you really want to prevent your staff from jumping on that gravy train?

The importance of a mobile strategy in travel policies

Despite the fact that mobile bookings are on the rise, just **31% of travel professionals** indicate that their travel program includes a mobile strategy. The remaining 69% stated that they plan on introducing a mobile strategy into their programme over the next two years, but is that soon enough?

“In the near future it is likely that all-encompassing mobile apps will provide a thorough, end-to-end service – aggregates of airlines, airports, hotels and ground transport systems will provide the tools for every part of the experience.”

- Stefan Rust, CEO of Exicon

If Rust is right, it means there will be an ever-increasing reliance placed on data and analytics by travel managers to help them make decisions and acceptance that there will be less hands-on control of the booking process.

That isn't a bad thing at all; sometimes, you need to let go for the good of the business and its employees.

The fluid travel policy

When it comes to business travellers, try new ideas. Test good ideas with a few travellers and get their feedback. Innovate the service you're giving - and view travellers as customers, not demanding, awkward colleagues.

The 'next big thing'

Voice search is tipped to be the next big disruption in the world of travel. Even Google believes it is moving from the role of traditional search engine to an '[answer engine](#)' and anyone who has used Apple's Siri digital assistant will know how far voice-based querying has developed in recent years.

Voice-based search will require a completely different set of algorithms for travel management companies who are currently set up to serve specific queries that relate to locations and the number of people booking. They will crack it, though, and when they do, travel managers need to be ready.

Are you ready for the next big thing in travel management?



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Wi-Fi wherever they go -
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The 'business traveller needs' checklist

Most of us like a checklist, so what better way to encapsulate everything contained within this ebook than to distill the needs of the modern traveller into a handy checklist?

Here's what the modern traveller needs and how you can give it to them -

Freedom

Travellers want to let out their inner consumer when booking business trips. Being constrained by rules, regulations and the ever-present eye of a travel manager frustrates them, because they often know of a far more cost-effective route.

—→ **How to give it to them**

You're an enabler, which means you're willing to treat business travellers like adults. Widen boundaries, encourage open discussion and praise those who end up saving the company money by booking themselves.

Open bookings.

The traveller knows the best hotel, the most reasonable places at which to eat and the optimal way to get to and from the conference. Why throw that away by enforcing hard-and-fast company booking policies?

—→ **How to give it to them**

Accept that open booking is now standard practice and not to be feared. Remind yourself that such a policy will actually save you time, too!

Connectivity

The internet is an intrinsic part of modern day life. It's just 'there', all the time, and business travel should never be hampered by poor connectivity.

—> How to give it to them

Favour travel partners that understand the importance of Wi-Fi, and accept the extra charge for in-flight internet (and the productivity benefits it offers the traveller).

BYOD acceptance

A bring your own device culture enables employees to use smartphones and tablets with which they're ultimately comfortable to perform better work. In travel, that means the unrestricted allowance to use their smartphone to book trips and handle travel documentation.

—> How to give it to them

Never assume the travel policy knows best when it comes to technology.

Less red tape

There's nothing worse than being slowed down by old processes and policies if you know a better, faster way to do something.

—> How to give it to them

Loosen the reigns on the travel policy. Consider sections of it that relate to booking and travel arrangements to be more guidelines than hard-and-fast rules.



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You need Feedback and you need to measure

So how are you going to know what's working and what isn't? You can make changes to your policy, work more closely with travellers, but you still need to measure whether it's working.

A good place to start is by setting up a survey to ask travellers how you're doing. It's possible to then start sending travellers a satisfaction survey after trips are completed - this will give you an idea of what employees like and dislike when travelling for business and can provide feedback on how the process can be improved.

Running a simple focus group can be a good next step from the satisfaction survey and gives the opportunity to ask for feedback face to face. Focus groups are a great way to find out the attitudes and feelings of the business travellers that can't always be conveyed in questionnaire surveys.

Be specific with your questions and ask travellers about the things that make travel more expensive, more of a drag on time, and more frustrating - this will help you improve your future strategy and provide good feedback for policy improvements and updates.

It might be that booking two flights because it's cheaper than a direct flight was also frustrating, tiring and all-round a waste of time for the traveller and should be reconsidered as a way of booking business travel.

Use these feedback methods as a way to get defined measures that you think would be useful to improve the service that you're giving to your colleagues and business travellers.



"98% of business travellers believe they can get a better deal for their company when arranging trips outside of their corporate booking channel."

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Final thoughts

"If everyone's going right, consider going left." Rafat Ali, CEO & Co-Founder, Skift

It's clear that business travel is changing, and as a result, so is the role of the travel manager.

The future game changers of the travel industry will provide travellers with an entirely new experience. They won't be about scrimping and saving on business trips or cutting corners to make things faster - they'll focus on revolutionising the industry.

Maybe you could change the game and be the travel manager that turns business travel on its head.



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