



MARKETING MANAGED TRAVEL VALUE REQUIRES MIX OF APPROACHES

Amid increased traveler expectations and changing marketplace conditions, travel managers are innovating to prove the value of their managed travel programs to internal stakeholders. An overriding challenge is that disruption has become constant and affects every aspect of a travel program and how stakeholders perceive its value.

“Disruption has moved from being incident-specific to an everyday issue that our industry needs to constantly manage and adapt to,” Caroline Strachan, Festive Road managing partner said in a [recent article](#). She cited supply chain and service issues, talent shortages, disrupted distribution channels and content fragmentation, heightened geopolitical conditions, and the increasingly unpredictable impact of climate change on travel plans.

Results Plus Consulting partner Kim Hamer noted, “We are seeing more and more companies take a more tactical view of travel rather than a strategic view, and I think

some of that is because of cost pressures. Travel managers need to take a holistic view and communicate how the travel program is specifically driving value for each stakeholder. For procurement, cost is important; for ESG, sustainability is key. It’s about really understanding your company goals and aligning the travel program with those goals to bring value.”

Expectations for business travel are also changing. “Travel managers did a fantastic job of opening lines of communication,” in recent years, noted Jami Hedrick, Direct Travel senior vice president of account management. “Now, travelers very much feel

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Diane Merlino
Writer

Mary Ann McNulty
Executive Director,
Content Solutions
mmculty@thebtngroup.com

Louis Magliaro
Executive Vice President
& Group Publisher
lmagliaro@thebtngroup.com

Mariza Moreira
Group Design Manager

Angelica Mundrick
Senior Graphic Designer



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like their voices have influence, and they're not afraid to utilize it. They've become a lot more vocal about what they don't like in the traditional, managed environment."

Generational variances are also emerging. Gen Z is very used to booking travel online on sites they choose. Selling them on the value of the managed travel program may take more communication.

Depending on company culture and travel program mandates, travel managers are

employing a mix of methods to internally market the value of managed travel. The work is complicated, but it has an upside.

"Despite the challenges, this provides an opportunity to reframe the conversation around a managed travel program in terms of value and get more buy-in within the organization from leadership, bookers and travelers," noted Daniel Cockton, Wood PLC vice president of global travel services.

Top 10 Ways to Prove Value to Internal Stakeholders

1 Know your company goals and culture

"Understanding more about your company goals and culture" is critical, Hamer said. That includes understanding if leadership is fully open to innovation, highly conservative about new technology and processes, or somewhere in between. Industry type and regulations may influence changes and value propositions. Honeywell is a case in point.

As a government contractor, Honeywell must follow [federal regulations](#) for travel related to those contracts. "We have a strict travel policy that isn't really open for interpretation," said John Grogan, Honeywell's North America travel manager. "We want our travelers to have a great traveling experience, don't get me wrong. But at the same time, we want them to follow policy."

2 Understand your travelers and gain their trust

With more concerns around pricing parity between suppliers' online rates and negotiated rates on online booking tools (OBTs), travel managers must ensure that travelers trust that they are getting the best rates and content through managed programs. While cost is important, [companies are increasingly using service and other factors to define value](#).

"Travelers need to understand that as the travel manager I'm going to give you access to the best content and the best possible rates with preferred suppliers so you can make the best choice at the point of sale and you don't have to go out and search multiple channels to get access to the best rates," Hamer said.

3 Think creatively to position duty of care as a key value of managed business travel

At Wood PLC, Cockton created a highly personalized campaign entitled "Making It Home" to help travelers understand the value and need for Wood's duty of care protocols. The campaign, which is now embedded in the organization, encourages travelers to post pictures showing who and what they want to come home to, and write a 'legacy letter' that would be delivered to a loved one in the event they did not return home from a business trip. "It's very powerful," he said.

As a veteran travel manager, Grogan said he always falls back on duty of care as a reason for policy compliance and program value. In the event of any disruptions—from the pandemic to weather to technology outages—the



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Wood PLC Travel Team Revamps Program Based on Traveler Feedback

With a goal of increasing understanding and compliance of the travel program among internal stakeholders and travelers, Wood PLC vice president of global travel services Daniel Cockton launched an ambitious program in partnership with his travel management company, American Express Global Business Travel. He started by “inviting the noise.”

The travel team fielded a comprehensive survey of more than 6,000 of Wood’s most active travelers and conducted one-on-one interviews with a core group of global-based travelers to identify pain points with the travel program.

The effort identified a dozen problem areas, including frustration around approval and booking systems, invoicing, and limits to in-policy inclusions. The team communicated the problems to leadership to secure their buy-in for change, then worked with the different departments and stakeholders to generate solutions.

“We challenged each problem area,” Cockton said. “We asked how we could make things better and simpler. That piece of work allowed us to rethink the travel policy.”

It also led to a number of technology and platform changes. Multiple booking tools were consolidated under one global provider, and all operational tools for travelers were centralized under a single sign-on portal, including booking, trip approval, visas, location information, invoices and more. A Yammer social networking platform and desktop chat option that connects travelers with a live agent were also introduced.

travel team, working with its travel management company, immediately contacts all who booked within its system to reroute or reaccommodate travelers as quickly as possible.

4 Rely on data to sell program value to leadership

When communicating to leaders and executives, a different approach is needed: data that demonstrates performance.

“Travel is highly emotive, but you have to take the emotion out of it in order to show what the true benefits and value are,” Hamer said. “Using data to market the program to leadership allows travel managers to identify trends, opportunities, efficiencies, savings, and more. Company leadership wants to see progress toward goals and “data helps you tell a story and justify a business case.”

Cockton echoed that view: “Data is demonstrable, and senior leadership time is limited, so leading with the data always helps get to the point and the ask quickly. That, in turn, leads to agile, informed decision making.”

5 Streamline approval processes

Some travel managers are gaining executive approval to pull away from complicated approval processes, which can be a pain point for travelers, bookers and travel managers. “If 99% of the time a trip’s getting approved, then why put everybody through the pain of having to formally approve something?” Hedrick asked. “There is also an understanding that an approval process is not necessarily driving behavior changes or choices.”

6 Introduce an internal social platform for travelers

Hedrick said the biggest communication shift she’s noted in the last two years is a move away from activities like lunch-and-learns to internal platforms like Slack or Teams. These platforms offer an instant channel for questions, complaints and suggestions. “With so many people being remote, travel programs are embracing those kinds of communication platforms much more widely,” she said. To be effective, travel team staff must monitor and reply to

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Cockton said traveler feedback prompted Wood to take a hard look at the experience provided by its preferred suppliers, resulting in dropping some and renegotiating contracts with others.

“We have had to make some changes to suppliers who weren’t performing to the level we needed,” he said. “My customers are my travelers and stakeholders, and I want all of our suppliers to have the same obsession to serve our customers that we have.”

Wood’s travel team continues to engage with key stakeholders. For example, monthly town hall meetings are open to all involved in travel “We tell them what’s going on, we share ideas, we ask questions, and we’ll bring in suppliers as well where we see fit,” Cockton said. “It’s only when you can get people to understand why you’re doing things that they’ll buy into it.”

“The key has been opening communication channels, inviting feedback, and reframing the conversation from cost to value. By addressing pain points and involving stakeholders, we’ve been able to build trust and buy-in for the managed travel program.”

“Travelers now very much feel like their voice does have influence, and they’re not afraid to utilize it.”

– Jami Hedrick, Direct Travel

questions in the channel about policies, preferred suppliers or disruptions. Travel managers at large companies note that their travel channels are the most frequented and liked. In fact, in some companies, frequent travelers even reply to questions or provide their own tips to colleagues.

7 Promote leisure rates and offers

Whether via Slack, Teams or a simple intranet page, some companies are establishing a dedicated resource to communicate promotions that employees can use for leisure travel. Travel managers encourage suppliers to share or create special offers for employees. For example, Honeywell has a robust site with market-specific information on flights, hotels, car rentals, special leisure offers and more. The message, Grogan said, is, “We care about you as a person, and here’s how you can use rates we’ve negotiated for leisure.”

8 Privacy issues pose new challenges

Heightened emphasis on privacy and personal data security has created a number of new challenges for travel managers, many involving traveler participation in loyalty programs and direct contact with employees from preferred suppliers. Approaches vary.

At Honeywell, protecting

employee information trumps any and all other benefits, according to Grogan. “We do not participate in anything that requires providing employee information to a supplier. It may hurt us in terms of savings, but we opt out.”

Wood has taken a different approach. The travel team works closely with the company’s privacy and legal teams to include safeguards and specifics in all supplier contracts that include access to traveler data. “We make sure that’s all laid out in the contracts at the early stage,” Cockton said. “Then, from a vendor perspective, we put as much of that through the TMC as possible, and access to personal data is very clearly articulated.”

Hamer noted that when travelers sign up for loyalty programs, “they’ve already given permission to share some personal information with the supplier or for the supplier to reach out to them. This is where, in my opinion, digital ID is becoming more and more prevalent because individuals can decide what data they want to share and release.”

9 Evaluate supplier performance through surveys, CSATs and NPSs

Customer satisfaction scores (CSAT) and Net Promoter Scores (NPS) are key factors to understand how suppliers are performing. Travel managers should examine those scores on a regular basis to determine if



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they are improving, then identify areas where travelers are not satisfied so optimizations can be made, Hamer advised.

Hedrick noted that while traveler surveys, CSATs and NPSs might reveal some dissatisfaction with suppliers, infrequent negative feedback, “doesn’t necessarily mean the supplier is not delivering on their commitment. However, if feedback becomes the norm, then it could mean that the supplier is no longer a good fit from a partnership perspective.”

That rule of thumb applies to providers on all levels of the price spectrum. “It doesn’t matter if it’s a low-cost carrier or a legacy carrier,” she said. “It’s about the traveler’s experience.”

At Wood, procurement does initial scoring of every supplier and no additional surveys or NPSs are used. “We should be able to have frank and open conversations,” Cockton said. “If we’ve got a problem, we fix it.”

10 Use surveys to identify pain points with travelers about the program or policy

Consider how often and why you want to ask travelers or other stakeholders to rate your travel program, experts advised. Hamer noted that, “Most buyers are very mindful about when and how they survey and what questions they ask.” An annual survey, often part of a broader companywide survey covering various departments, is the most common. The key is to communicate the survey results, along with any program or policy changes in response.

Some companies limit the number of surveys—or even emails—that travel or other departments can send to employees. In such instances, travel managers must strategically plan how best to use survey opportunities. ●

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