



# REIMAGINING CORPORATE TRAVEL

SPONSORED BY



**Content fragmentation, supplier-direct initiatives, new technology and apps and increasingly frustrated travelers all challenge travel managers to find the right formula of old tricks and new techniques to maintain an effective travel program.**

**B**usiness travel management during the past few decades has shown itself as a flexible and durable concept. The constants of its blueprint for success, like driving traveler compliance and directing volume to suppliers, have helped organizations adapt to once-new concepts like online booking and mobile devices, incorporating these innovations into their programs. But relying on the tried and true methods wasn't then sufficient to truly realize a successful program, and the same holds true today. Content fragmentation, supplier-direct initiatives, new technology and apps and increasingly frustrated travelers all challenge travel managers to find the right formula of old tricks and new techniques to maintain an effective travel program.

The BTN Group recently staged a webinar on this topic, sponsored by travel technology provider Deem and featuring a panel of travel managers and a travel management company executive. The panelists illustrated the challenges and potential consequence of several recent travel industry developments, and offered strategies to help confront them.



**Our strategy was to migrate to a more mandated travel program where we could put up guardrails to help travelers make those right choices and make them quickly, while having process in place to handle exceptions on a case-by-case basis**

*Joel Baum, Harris Corp.*

## CONTENT FRAGMENTATION

Travel suppliers, and airlines in particular, in recent years have changed what were standard offerings, introducing new fare classes, charging a la carte fees for once-bundled services and furthering dynamic pricing. Asked to vote on the biggest challenge such content fragmentation creates for managed travel programs, 30 percent—the highest figure—cited duty of care and security issued while 29 percent pointed to a loss of program control.

Panelist Cindy Shumate, senior manager of travel and meetings for Regeneron Pharmaceuticals, said the addition of new fare classes and unbundled fares that are marketed directly to travelers can prove confusing as to the exact services included with the ticket. Additionally, reflecting these choices in her company’s online booking tool can be onerous, she said.

“Some of these products may have fantastic bundled value for our travelers, and we may want them to choose that bundled fare over the unbundled, but it won’t show up as the lowest fare, and many of us have lowest-fare policies in place,” Shumate said. “Talk about confusion.”

Panelist Joel Baum, Harris Corp. manager of indirect strategic sourcing, said his company has addressed this challenge by limiting travelers’ options. “Our strategy was to migrate to a more mandated travel program where we could put up guardrails to help travelers make those right choices and make them quickly, while having process in place to handle exceptions on a case-by-case basis,” he said.

Calling the challenge “an opportunity” for managed travel programs and travel management companies while acknowledging that “I’m not going to pretend we’re there today,” panelist Evan Konwiser, digital traveler vice president for American Express Global Business Travel, added that “getting a single source of content, be it air, hotel or car, will not be sufficient. We have to look more broadly and provide the content the travelers expect to see on top of the negotiated rate. They have to earn their way into the [online booking] display.”

## SUPPLIER-DIRECT INITIATIVES

Still, some suppliers aren’t finding their way to some online booking displays by design, instead selling their content directly to business travelers via their web sites. About 86 percent of webinar listeners



**If you don't know what to ask [suppliers], you could miss a functionality or a tweak that results in a frustrating user experience**

*Cindy Shumate,  
Regeneron Pharmaceuticals*

voted that travel managers should be at least moderately concerned by suppliers' increasing willingness to sell directly, and Shumate agreed, noting that the initial promise of online booking was enabling travelers to see all product choices available to them in one place.

"Supplier-direct initiatives are taking us away from that," she said. "I'm concerned about going backwards. If we're asking travelers to make low-fare or policy-compliant decisions, they need that [information]."

When moderator Tony D'Astolfo, Deem senior vice president and chief commercial officer, noted that the perks suppliers offer some loyalty program members to encourage them to book directly can appeal to frequent travelers, Shumate noted that the benefits suppliers offer her managed travelers, including priority boarding and rebooking, are quite attractive too.

Harris Corp.'s mandated program doesn't leave much room for supplier-direct initiatives, Baum said. "For us, way too much risk, in terms of financial and duty of care," he said of allowing such booking. "We require travelers to book through our approved channels—online booking tool or TMC—and require proof of compliance with each expense report."

### EASING TRAVELER FRUSTRATIONS

Online booking tools can have their problems too—in fact, 44 percent of webinar viewers indicated that bad booking tool experiences were managed travelers' top frustration, beyond determining travel choices and pre-trip planning.

"It's one of my frustrations too," said Shumate, noting that in her career she has been a part of four implementations of online booking tools, all of which have been configured differently. The devil is in the details of such configurations, she said, and travel managers must be thorough to ensure booking tools offer a good user experience.

"If you don't know what to ask [suppliers], you could miss a functionality or a tweak that results in a frustrating user experience," she said. "It takes time, and hopefully you've got some tool experts working with you. But proper configuration results in a better user experience."

Konwiser noted that traveler frustration isn't limited to self-booking. "Improving the quality of the point-of-sale experience is a hot topic

for us right now, but it's also in the support experience during [reaccommodation], and it's in the expense experience. It's really in the end-to-end piece with what is making travelers frustrated and where the opportunities are.”

## INNOVATION

Some opportunities doubtlessly will be fueled by technological innovation, and two-thirds of webinar viewers anticipate that a would-be “all-encompassing travel app” would have the greatest impact on their travel program, once introduced.

Baum and Shumate said they looked forward to the potential of an app that could offer travelers comprehensive information and booking functionality, but Konwiser said he had “mixed feelings” about the concept, preferring instead the notion of a “seamless mobile ecosystem.”

“Supplier apps are going to play a role no matter what we do,” Konwiser said. “But we want to know that they are all playing nice together, and it's simple to get information and [fulfill] needs. I don't think it ever will be one app, and I don't think the traveler needs it to be.”

Produced by:

**BTNGROUP**  
CONTENT SOLUTIONS

**Chris Davis**  
Writer

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

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

**Anthony Carnevale**  
Publisher  
acarnevale@thebtngroup.com

**Mariza Moreira**  
Group Design Manager

About Deem



The most difficult part of any business trip is too often the trip itself. It shouldn't be. Deem makes it painless for the traveler to get down to business without distraction, simpler for the travel manager and management company to keep track of all the moving parts, and easier for partners to get the information they need to stay competitive.

The Deem Work Force platform is designed for the entire business travel ecosystem using machine learning, AI and predictive analytics. Deem's suite of tools range from a dynamic traveler booking platform, travel manager cost controls, travel agency service technology and supplier revenue opportunities, including the world's largest car service affiliate network and operator solutions.

Deem's Work Force Platform services more than 35,000 corporate customers in 61 countries, speaking 15+ languages - including the world's largest travel management companies. The company, headquartered in San Francisco, CA, with offices in Bangalore, India, is backed by leading venture capital funds, as well as corporate and private equity investors.

Learn more at [deem.com](http://deem.com)