

Results

- 90 percent online adoption (2007)
- \$1.4 million in booking fee savings by booking online vs. offline
- 28 percent difference in cost per mile vs. participants of a 2007 Topaz International benchmark, equaling \$7.8 million in savings
- 73 percent touchless transactions rate (2007; up from 39 percent in 2005)
- 60 percent hotel attachment rate
- Travel department has ranked No. 1 in internal surveys since 2003

Founded in 1969, Countrywide is a diversified financial services company focused primarily on real estate finance and related activities. Countrywide is America's No. 1 home loan lender and is ranked No. 91 in the Fortune 500.

Challenge

Launching a New Travel Program

Countrywide has eight corporate offices and more than 500 branches throughout the U.S., with global operations in Costa Rica, Hong Kong, India and the UK. The company has an estimated air spend of \$25 million and classifies approximately 20,000 employees as travelers.

Countrywide is one of the pioneers in online booking, rolling out their online solution in 2000. Chris Arnhoelter, Countrywide travel technology manager, was hired as the central contact for employees as they transitioned to this new method of booking business travel. Arnhoelter was tasked with providing training and guiding employees and a large population of travel arrangers as they adapted to online booking.

"We wanted our travelers to embrace online booking," said Daniel Raynard, SVP of global travel and card solutions. "We introduced it in stages and among different divisions, so we were really able to build support around the program."

Solutions

Drive Online Adoption

Six months after the initial launch, the company switched to a more online-savvy agency and introduced an executive mandate. The mandate requires all employees (except a small group of executives) to book online in order to travel.

"We'd rather educate travelers to do the right thing than punish them for doing the wrong thing," said Joyce Greenberg, vice president and manager of global travel operations.

With a new agency on board and the mandate in place, the travel team went to work on growing the online program. The team launched an internal support Web site called the Travel Wizard, which houses travel policy, contact information and booking tool FAQ's. The support site links to GetThere and both can be accessed through Single Sign On (SSO).

The travel team had a clear goal in mind: increase online adoption. Traditional steps, like training sessions for arrangers, were taken. So were more unconventional tactics.

"To demonstrate online efficiency, Chris and I would take a stopwatch and time people booking online versus offline," Greenberg recalled. This exhibition, along with having a central point of contact internally, helped dispel any fears or uncertainties that employees had when changing the way they booked travel.

Results

Countrywide's online adoption is at 90 percent, putting it right alongside GetThere's top customers. The figure is even more impressive when one considers that all travel is taken into account, including contract work, senior executive and new hire travel.

Greenberg credits GetThere's ease-of-use as one of the strong drivers behind their adoption success. "Our executive administrators would rather book online than call a VIP agent," she said.

The travel team calculates that with 90 percent online adoption, the company saves \$1.4 million a year in agency fees. Raynard's team also tracked ticket cost on a per mile basis year-over-year against Topaz International, with a goal of coming in 20 percent lower than Topaz participants. Countrywide did 28 percent better than Topaz, a difference of \$7.8 million.

When Countrywide first negotiated online versus offline fees with its agency six years ago, the cost difference hovered around 50 percent. Now, it's an even greater chasm. "It's a much more dramatic differential," Raynard said. "You're looking at 200-plus percent."

Executive support has also proved critical to the travel program's success. Early on, executives were shown the differences in average ticket price and cost per mile on online versus offline reservations. "The visual guilt was the greatest thing to come out of online versus offline booking," Greenberg said. "They were sold when they saw that data."

Implications

In 2007, Countrywide chose New York-based travel agency Ultramar as its new Travel Management partner. The reason, Raynard notes, was because of the technology offering Ultramar built by using existing vendor best practices that can be individually customized for customer programs.

"Working with Countrywide gave us the exciting opportunity to further deploy our Traveler and Travel Manager Dashboard portal environments," said Ultramar Chief Information Officer Thomas Chermack. "In addition to non-refundable pop-up notifications upon user log-in, travelers and travel managers have access to real time reservation information and tracking tools. By using GetThere's Single Sign On functionality, we have essentially created a travel 'extranet' that will serve as a home base to all applications used for travel - from seamless access to GetThere to one-click online check-in."

Ultramar built the Countrywide traveler dashboard, which all Countrywide travelers land on upon sign-in. The dashboard displays an unused ticket bank before users book a reservation, which will help drive further savings.

The travel team spent the first quarter of 2008 working with Ultramar on a Dynamic Messaging feature to promote preferred hotel properties. Dynamic Messaging will elevate the status of preferred properties and drive bookings there. It is also a valuable asset during vendor negotiations.

Future plans call for Countrywide to add more GetThere functionality, coordinating the effort with Ultramar's automation to reduce manual operations.

"We will continue to work very closely with Dan, Joyce and the Countrywide travel team to provide functionality that is useful for all of their employees that book online travel on a daily basis," Chermack said.