

Business travel: Is it time to take a deep dive into your data?

With business travel's 'bounce back' well underway, key trends began to emerge in 2022, including a renewed focus on duty of care; technology; sustainability; and the importance of travel data.



And while each are significant, it's impossible to overplay the role travel data. It will transform your approach to corporate travel, delivering impressive savings and a solid ROI.

Whether your company has already returned to pre-2020 travel levels, or you've adopted a 'slow and selective' approach, here are just four reasons to take a deep breath and dive into your travel data:

1. The 'Why we Fly' matrix

Deloitte's 'Why we Fly' matrix plots 10 corporate travel 'purposes' (for example, sales meetings and client acquisition; internal training and development; and onsite visits and project monitoring) on a table, based on two key factors: relative importance to business success, and the extent to which they are dependent on face-to-face interaction.

According to Deloitte, sales, along with opportunities to strengthen client relationships and network at conferences, are leading the sector's comeback and will continue to generate demand. Internal team meetings and trainings face the slowest

return – and the biggest sustained spend reduction.

It's worth thinking about your own 'Why we Fly' matrix. It will differ from business to business, but help you determine what travel is crucial to your business's success (thrive); meetings that are dependent on face-to-face interaction but don't necessarily happen very often (niche); interactions that are crucial to success but can easily be replaced by tech/online platforms (battleground), and those instances that are less critical to success – and easily replaced by tech (struggle).

"It's important to identify your 'mission critical' travel for the year ahead," says Bonnie Smith, GM of FCM. "Look at your historical data, and make sure you plan (and book) important trips well in advance. Not only will you avoid pricey last-minute fares, but you could combine quarterly site visits, for example, with team meetings or client catch-ups. Think quality over quantity and really 'sweat' your travel wherever possible."

2. Track and monitor your travel programme's progress

According to a recent study by the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA), travel management is becoming increasingly strategic, with travel managers reporting that they place a great deal of value on having accurate, holistic travel data, which helps them to make decisions – and demonstrate the value their programme brings to the company. In fact, 70% of travel managers currently say they consider leveraging and analysing travel data to be "very important," while a larger proportion – 82% – say it will be "very important" in the near future.

For Smith, customised, interactive dashboards are a non-negotiable in any travel programme.

"Clear, instant data helps you identify short-term trends, long-term shifts, problem areas and opportunities. Make sure your TMC or booking platform has dashboarding capabilities, so you can monitor your programme's performance, course correct if you need to, plan ahead, and develop a really robust travel programme that works for your organisation."

3. Identify savings

Unsurprisingly, cost is a huge factor as companies make a return to travel. The good news is that travel data allows you to identify leakage (where travellers book outside of policy), travellers who regularly overspend, the use of non-preferred suppliers, unnecessary travel and so much more.

In order to make meaningful savings, says Smith, you have to have full view of your organisation's true spend.

"Often companies only look at the big-ticket items, like flights and accommodation, but things like hotel parking, Wi-Fi and lounge access can quickly add up. Make sure you're capturing all your data – and have full visibility over your true spend. It's the only way to manage your travel budget."

4. Negotiate deals and perks

Another reason to care about travel data? Negotiating power. Accurate data is invaluable when it comes to negotiating – and securing – preferred rates with your travel partners.

"Whether you're a massive multinational or smaller SME, the principle remains the same," says Smith. "Show vendors how and where you spend your money and ask them to come to the party. Unfortunately, without accurate spend data, you'll have no leverage in your vendor negotiations. It's a big deal – especially if you're renegotiating contracts and RFPs."

Of course, if you're just starting to capture your data you might have to lean on your TMC for special rates and perks.

"Global TMCs should be able to use their own buying power to negotiate on your behalf," says Smith. "Think free upgrades, lounge access, priority boarding, and even free Wi-Fi at your hotel."

5. Get serious about sustainability

According to Accenture's Tuba Guclu, Managing Director - Travel, data insight can have a significant impact on traveller behaviour:

"Did you know that the amount of CO2 produced on a business class flight from London to San Francisco is double what a family car produces in one year – and half the carbon footprint of a person living in Britain during the same period? These statistics are eye-opening. If they don't highlight the importance of travel sustainability, I don't know what does."

But in order to influence travel booking and behaviour, you need to have a handle on your company's travel footprint.

"Chat to your TMC about carbon calculators, carbon offsetting and other tools," says Smith. "Once you see the data in black and white, you can support carbon offsetting projects, prioritise 'quality over quantity' when it comes to trips, incentivise better choices, and track your progress against your sustainability goals."

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