

Executives go for DIY approach

Chris Tolhurst ; April 5, 2007

Australian executives have taken a shine to booking their own travel online, particularly domestic flights and many are saving money for their employers by self-booking.

Most corporate travel agents today offer their clients web access to an online booking engine (OBE). Using this tool, executives can call up screens showing multiple airline choices on particular routes and book or alter arrangements and pay for - or charge back - travel costs a few hours before flying.

Corporate Travel Management managing director Jamie Pherous and Flight Centre marketing director Colin Bowman both say it is common for executives who self-book to switch to cheaper flights to save money. They say web-savvy executives will self-book a domestic flight on Qantas, but fly the return trip on Virgin Blue if Virgin has a cheaper fare and such a booking conforms to the company travel policy.

Pherous says companies can sharply reduce travel spending by allowing staff to self-book as opposed to having them contact a travel agent by phone or email to make the booking. Some of the recent content upgrades by the group include the addition of white papers on trends in business travel and aviation, destination information and profiles on FCm travel consultants and other staff.

"If that is the case then it is a cultural thing within a company that has to be worked out," he says.

"All we can do is report on that. But I think with any company policy you have to take into account and appreciate how much you value your staff's time and what you are prepared to do to retain staff.

"Travelling out of hours is a burden for some employees, so it depends on the culture - some (companies) are very tight, some are not.

"We have benchmark clients where travel policy compliance starts from the top down and they tend to be the companies that do the best in the overall saving of money."

Using an agency-backed OBE is just one option when it comes to self-booking.

"A good online booking engine is very tailored to the customer," Pherous says.

Axis Travel Centre director Max Najar, has developed a travel OBE for his clients based on Sabre reservations technology, expects agent-backed OBE systems to grow in popularity.

Najar says the idea that an individual business traveller or their personal assistants can successfully negotiate the booking process by booking direct with airlines and other suppliers is no longer accepted by business.

"More corporations and companies see the use of travel agents as complementary, which is the American view as well," he says.

Cost-effective

- * It is common for executives who self-book to switch to cheaper flights to save money.
- * Online booking engines have encouraged the growth of self-booking for business travel.
- * Agent-backed OBE systems are expected to grow in popularity.