The Tortoise And The Hare

The world of Business Travel continues to bleed into the role of the Global Mobility and HR Professional. Business Travellers weren't on the agenda of Global Mobility, but as employee numbers on 'traditional' assignment types have reduced, our focus as an industry has switched more towards the Traveller. We're seeing new job titles appear on LinkedIn; mentions of Travel and Mobility Management, or Business-Travel specialisms within Mobility/HR Teams and these new roles being supported by parallel roles in the vendor-space too.

Assignees can be compared to the Tortoise; a steady procession through a well-planned and managed series of tasks ensuring safety and compliance leading up to a 'move date' in 3- or 6-months' time. The Business Traveller is a different beast, requiring a looser framework, adapting to 'moves' in days and hours instead of weeks and months. The safety and compliance for this population is arguably more important than that of the Assignee, due to the much larger size of the travelling population and the regularity with which they travel – so how can we achieve an acceptable level of compliance for this transient group?

Assessing Every Travel Event Before It Is Booked Is The Obvious Thing To Do?

"Why would an organisation ever let its people book a travel event without checking that the employee is compliant to travel prior to travel?" – is a common query that comes from the HR/Mobility space. In our experience, Company Culture is the biggest reason why this isn't a possibility. The company may prioritise growth, completing a deal or customer satisfaction over travelling in a compliant fashion. The Corporate may be pro-compliance, but the nature of the work they do means last-minute travel to satisfy customer demands are critical and the company cannot entertain the idea of travel being denied or delayed for compliance purposes.

Approximately 25%-30% of organisations may have the Corporate Culture necessary to ask their employees to seek approval and complete compliance assessments prior to booking travel, but for the remaining 75% we must adapt to mitigate risk while still allowing the employee to meet business demands and finding the balance between business need and compliance.

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The 'Post-Booking' Assessment Model

For Corporates that aren't able to assess their employee's prior to booking travel, the most popular way to mitigate travel-related compliance and safety risk is with a 'post-booking' model which utilises data gathered from the Corporate travel agent (or Travel Management Company) about the booked trip event. Here, Global Mobility needs the support of fellow Stakeholders, often from the Travel and Safety verticals who have extensive experience in this field and have for years been the holders of data that would improve a Mobility Team's pursuit of compliance. As Mobility professionals, we have a new set of travel jargon to learn, adding PNR (Passenger, Name, Record) data, GDS' (Global Distribution Systems), OBTs (Online Booking Tools) and Cancellations, Refunds and Exchanges alongside the mobility world of PWD, A1, Cost Projection and 'SPoC'.

We have all likely engaged with PNR data without knowing it; the 7-character, alpha-numeric code that sits atop our holiday booking confirmation email. We can harness this data to assess the risks of employee travel without them having to engage in any activity other than booking their trip, provided you have a technology platform that's able to interpret the data correctly. The PNR contains the who, what, where and when of employee travel. A new departure within the travel vendors is a recognition that they need to support greater granularity and detail on the trip purpose, then passing this data to compliance providers to accurately gauge the impact of an individual's travel. The most forward-thinking Travel Management Companies are now adding this detail to their client interface and support API transmission to compliance systems. This ensures a good 'User Experience' which is critical as we now expect systems to share data (appropriately) to avoid duplicate entry in multiple systems for the busy Traveller.

Data Collation And Interpretation

So, now we have the PNR data available to us, to pro-actively monitor Traveller activity for the first time. It's critical to lean on technology to turn this into meaningful data to support a compliance process. The travel industry has almost all the content we need, but has never needed to track a Traveller's accumulative time at host to date, or whether they already own a multi-state A1 certificate. This is where integration with compliance-specific platforms can make sense of the captured PNR data.

Historically, some Travel Management Companies have shared PNR data via weekly or monthly SFTP (Secure File Transfer Protocol) data packets. This isn't robust enough for quality compliance assessments due to the fast-paced nature of travel bookings, cancellations and changing itineraries. A compliance assessment on a

2-week-old trip booking may be null and void as the Traveller has travelled, or the trip had been cancelled, with that data showing in a subsequent data packet. The transfer of PNR data must be done 'live' (or as 'live' as Corporate policies allow) via API, allowing the tracking of data and location changes, and monitoring cancellations as closely as possible. This accuracy is integral to quality tracking as over- or under-reporting a Traveller's time at host will either have a compliance-event, or down-stream vendor cost impact for the Corporate.

Human Behaviour Has An Effect On Travel Data

Booked travel data highlights interesting human scenarios, which can add complexity to the compliance assessment process. Corporates with successful tracking programmes use this data and the lessons learned to improve relationships with Travel colleagues, improve Travel Policies, and generate cost savings across the travel programme. These scenarios tend to fall into two main areas:

- Complex travel lanes and combinations of travel tickets
- Unexpected booking practices .

Complex Travel Lanes And Combinations Of Travel Tickets

The simplest form of travel booking is a Return Trip, where tickets (and hotels) are purchased at the same time and issued under a single PNR. Some organisations have a high percentage of trip bookings made as Return Trips, particularly where there is a robust travel policy in place and the company performs activities that can be planned and booked in advance.

As travel is booked at shorter notice, or Travellers link multiple trips in a single travel period, PNR data typically tends to become more complex, and a multitude of booking possibilities can be evidenced. Trips where the outbound and inbound 'legs' are booked separately under different PNRs require algorithms to interpret – technology can sometimes reasonably assume the employee has spent 'X' number of days in country as it's possible to link trips to and from the same travel hub.

'Open-Jaws' are a common travel pattern created by the Travel Industry to make travel between multiple host locations as simple and cost-effective as possible while minimising layovers and delays. This causes compliance complexities as it becomes harder to track the time spent in the host location by the Traveller as the trip becomes more complex than a simple return trip.

The greater percentage of Return Trip bookings a travelling population makes can be linked directly to better data accuracy from a post-booking data feed.

Unexpected Booking Practices

Regular Travellers can see trip booking as an artform. Post-booking data feeds have uncovered a host of clever booking practices and malpractices, which can be flagged to Travel Stakeholders and used to improve policies and reduce travel programme spend.

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Common Traveller behaviour can include booking multiple return flights from a meeting location to ensure the employee can jump on the first plane back if the meeting finishes early. This is not only costly in reservation fees to the Organisation, but it's common for Travellers to forget to cancel the booked 'contingency' tickets. TST supports one Client with a group of Travellers doing this 7 or 8 times each, per trip to the USA for over 2 years! An Organisation is unlikely to know this was ever happening if it wasn't for a post-booking travel compliance assessment, which is where Global Mobility can add value to the Travel function to develop cross-department collaboration.

Why Should You Look At A 'Post-Booking' Model?

The post-booking model has been created to support Corporates in mitigating compliance risks where a pre-travel booking assessment is not possible due to the culture of the company. By virtue of automating the post-booking assessment, and avoiding the need to engage the Traveller, accuracy is harmed slightly at the beginning of a project. When teamed with a robust Travel Policy and after the data cleansing cycle described in this article, the post-booking model provides a chance for most companies to proactively manage their travel-related risk for the first time, while Global Mobility continues to facilitate travel and helps the business to reach its goals.

In Summary

This article has touched on some of the Consultancy-topics Tracker Software Technologies has regularly with Corporates who are starting to explore Business Traveller tracking for compliance and safety purposes; firstly, pursuing a method of travel tracking that fits the Corporate Culture of the Organisation and secondly, highlighting the wins and pitfalls with the chosen approach. This article has focused on travel-booking platform integration, which will never provide 100% accuracy on its own. Quality data also exists in other systems such as Expense Management platforms, private jet and armoured transport manifests and entry-card records, which can also be used to validate the booked trip data to enhance the accuracy of your programme. We will explore these data points further in a later article.

The Travel Industry can provide us with so much besides a rich source of data as we seek to improve the way our employees travel and mitigate compliance risk. As an industry, we can give back to our Travel colleagues, helping them to shape booking policies and reduce spending, which will in turn give us more accurate data about when and why employees are travelling. Corporates and their Vendors continue to be better tackling this complex issue as a team, offering new ideas and data sources to keep Travellers meeting customer demands in a compliant fashion, without burdening the Traveller with additional steps, assessments and forms to complete. If you're planning to pursue a Traveller tracking solution for compliance and duty of care purposes, make connections with your Travel colleagues to ensure your project gets off to the best possible start.

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Tom leads the relationships Tracker Software Technologies (TST) has with our new and prospective Clients. There are many variables when implementing compliance processes, from customer experience and technology configuration to cross-functional collaboration and Tom helps compliance stakeholders navigate this environment to reach a solution that works for the company and their travellers. Tom can be found on LinkedIn, or contacted at Tom.Crosby@tst-international.com , if you wish to explore the contents of this article in greater detail.