CASE STUDY

GetThere
Innovative.
Customer focused.
Industry leading.

General Electric Company

Online Booking System Helps Centralize Global Corporate Travel Program

EUROPEAN CORPORATE TRAVEL PROGRAM

- 15,000 travelers
- $60 million spent annually on air travel
- Travelers take approximately 100,000 trips a year

PERCENTAGE OF TRAVEL BOOKINGS MADE THROUGH GetThere

- Over 50% adoption in the United Kingdom
- Over 40% adoption in Belgium, Netherlands,and Luxemborg regions
- Estimated $2 million in travel savings when all European sites reach 50% adoption

OVERVIEW

General Electric is a diversified technology and services company dedicated to creating products that make life better–from aircraft engines and power generation to financial services, medical imaging, television programming and plastics. GE operates in more than 100 countries and employs more than 300,000 people worldwide.

Three years ago, GE began a global initiative to move internal processes online in order to cut expenses and improve productivity. As part of that global initiative, GE introduced GetThere's corporate online booking technology to its travel program in Europe, based on proven success of the self-booking system in GE's offices in the United States.

EUROPE GOES ONLINE

General Electric's European travel program consists of 15,000 travelers who take approximately 100,000 trips a year, accounting for $60 million in annual air travel spend.

Two years ago, the GetThere system was rolled out to the United Kingdom and Benelux (Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg) regions.

Today, more than 50 percent of GE travel reservations in the United Kingdom and over 40 percent of travel bookings in the Benelux region are made online through the GetThere system. The online booking system was also recently rolled out to offices in Germany and France, which have quickly reached over 30 percent adoption. Within the next year, GE plans to introduce the system to offices in other European countries.

RETURN ON INVESTMENT

The GetThere online booking system has streamlined GE's travel program by reducing phone calls between travelers and agents, empowering travelers to choose their own travel options online twenty-four hours a day, and by automating routine parts of the travel booking process. This translates into significant and measurable savings for the company through:

Reduced travel budget—GE's goal is to direct 50 percent of all travel bookings in Europe through the GetThere system. Based on the company's calculations, this will reduce European travel spending by $2 million.

Lower travel transaction costs—The company has lowered travel transaction costs 25 percent by automating parts of the booking process.

Lower average ticket price—GE's average ticket price is seven percent lower for bookings made online compared to bookings made by telephone.

Manpower reduction—The company expects to reduce the number of agents required by 30 percent. Many of the remaining staff will transition from front-line phone assistance to more strategic travel-related services.

EUROPEAN TRAVEL ENVIRONMENT

One of the key reasons GE chose GetThere for its online travel program was because of the system's ability to work with multiple global distribution systems (GDSs), currencies, and air carriers in countries throughout Europe, while ensuring that corporate travel policy was consistently adhered to during the booking process.

Keith Mullineux, regional manager for Travel Management Services at GE International, has been instrumental in the rollout of the GetThere online booking system in Europe.

"Business travel in Europe is a much different entity than it is in the U.S.," said Mullineux.

GetThere

"While the majority of trips in the U.S. are domestic, the opposite is true for Europe. We deal with more than twenty countries and air carriers, and different GDSs that have to be considered when trying to implement a global travel policy and a single online booking system."

SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES

Mullineux points out key strategies that GE has used to achieve success with its European corporate travel program:

Centralized Operations—Because there are so many variables within the European marketplace, the company felt it was important to standardize whatever processes possible by using a single online booking system (GetThere), a single travel agency (Carlson Wagonlit Travel), and a minimal number of global distribution systems throughout Europe.

Mandate—GE now requires that simple trips be booked through the GetThere online booking system. Carlson agents act as a front-line resource, only when special assistance is needed. Agents refer employees to the online booking system when called for a simple reservation.

Teamwork—GE meets with GetThere every two weeks as it continues to implement the online system across the continent. Carlson Wagonlit has been highly supportive of the online technology, and its employees act as internal travel staff to GE, managing administration of the GetThere system in conjunction with providing travel-related services.

CHANGING LANDSCAPE

GE's European division has also had to deal with the emergence of low-cost carriers and Web-only specials sold exclusively on air carrier Web sites in Europe. These low fares appeal to GE's price-driven approach to travel, but are used only when they make practical business sense.

"Web fares are really more of a perception issue, they only make up about 2 percent of our business travel activity," said Mullineux. "Regular carriers are also competing with some great fares now – and we depend on a tool that searches these out and presents them to our travelers."

Another challenge for GE is that not all carriers in Europe participate in the distribution systems corporations and travel agencies use to make bookings. Mullineux does believe many of these carriers see the need to tie into existing distribution processes in order to serve the needs of corporations with multi-national interests.

"You have to be persistent in communicating with the air carriers," said Mullineux. "At the end of the day, they have to look at where their revenue is coming from and respond to the needs of that audience."

GetThere MULTI-SOURCE ENGINE

As pricing and distribution methods continue to change in Europe, the GetThere Multi-Source Engine ensures that travel options from all sources, whether it be a GDS, a supplier Web site, or another new source, are displayed to travelers and that the data is properly captured and stored for comprehensive travel management by GE.

"The travel landscape in Europe is changing so rapidly that it is hard to predict where it will be 18 months from now," said Mullineux. "GetThere's online booking system provides us with the security of knowing that we have a solid platform in place that will be able to capture data from whatever sources become the standard, so that we can manage our travel program with global consistency."

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Keith Mullineux,
Regional Manager of Travel Management Services
General Electric

GetThere L.P.
Corporate Headquarters
4045 Campbell Avenue
Menlo Park, CA 94025, USA
Tel: (650) 752.1500
Fax: (650) 752.1750

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