

Upgrade

ISSUE 2

FCM TRAVEL SOLUTIONS MEA

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Welcome to the next issue of Upgrade magazine. It has been an exciting few months for FCM in MEA since we published our first issue.

I am proud to announce that FCM has been voted the World's Leading Travel Management Company in the Middle East for the eighth year running. FCM has also been named a Great Place to Work in the UAE. Turn to **page 14** for more news of what we have been up to in the region.

On top of this, FCM won the World Travel Award for Leading Travel Agency in Saudi Arabia, so our destination feature on Riyadh is especially timely.

It is particularly rewarding to receive such recognition of our business in 2019 as we countdown to the end of

our financial year in June. This has been a landmark 12 months for FCM in the Middle East and Africa. Not only have we grown our business significantly both locally and regionally, but also spearheaded the launch of ground-breaking business travel technology.

With that in mind, appropriately our technology feature on **page 8** focuses on the evolution of online booking tools and FCM's vision for a world where portal, mobile and online booking tools will blend into a single, seamless user experience.

We also take a look at the importance of data in a successful travel programme on **page 4** and how, like most things in life, it's all about quality not quantity.

I hope you enjoy reading this issue of Upgrade and feel that we have got the quality and quantity of its contents just right.

Ciarán Kelly

Managing Director, Middle East & Africa Network
FCM Travel Solutions

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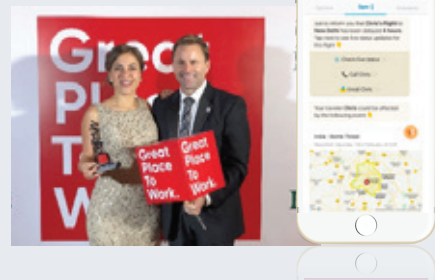
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EDITORIAL

COMMISSIONING EDITOR

Betty Low

CONTRIBUTORS

Catherine Chetwynd,
Mark Frary, Linda Fox

FCM EDITORIAL ADVISER

Vanessa Aves

ADVERTISING

ADVERTISING SALES

Sue Robinson

DESIGN

PRODUCTION & MANAGEMENT

WonDesigns, Caren Johnstone

LEAD DESIGNER & ILLUSTRATOR

Leanne Armstrong

DESIGNER

André Albuquerque

PUBLISHING

MANAGER

Rebecca Talbot

PRINTING

REDBOX Group

Ed Cooling

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Images sourced from suppliers, FCM Travel Solutions, and stock photography

New business enquiries

salesuk@fcmtravel.co.uk

Editorial and advertising enquiries

enquiries@fcmupgrade.com

Sizing up your data

Travel managers agree data is vital, but Mark Frary finds that identifying which data is needed will vary among programmes



A 2018 ACTE survey of 300 travel managers found discrepancies between metrics used to measure the success of their travel programmes and what is important, given the significant recent changes in the industry.

Greeley Koch, Executive Director, ACTE Global, said: “The travel industry has evolved to a startling degree over the past 20 years, from one providing a deeply human, streamlined experience through travel agents, to one that embraces technology, customisation and traveller centricity. It is incumbent upon travel managers to adapt to this new reality and establish meaningful KPIs that capture not only the numbers—cost savings, hotel attachment, productivity—but also intangible elements, such as traveller safety and morale, and the programme’s impact on recruitment and retention efforts. No one within the organisation is better positioned to do this.”

“
It is imperative to distinguish quality and quantity - as with everything in life”

*Juan-Antonio Iglesias,
Head of Account Management,
EMEA, FCM Travel Solutions*

The focus on data has emerged because there often comes a point when travel managers think to themselves: “What now?”

QUALITY MEASUREMENT OF A TRAVEL PROGRAMME: WHAT IS USED VS. WHAT IS IMPORTANT

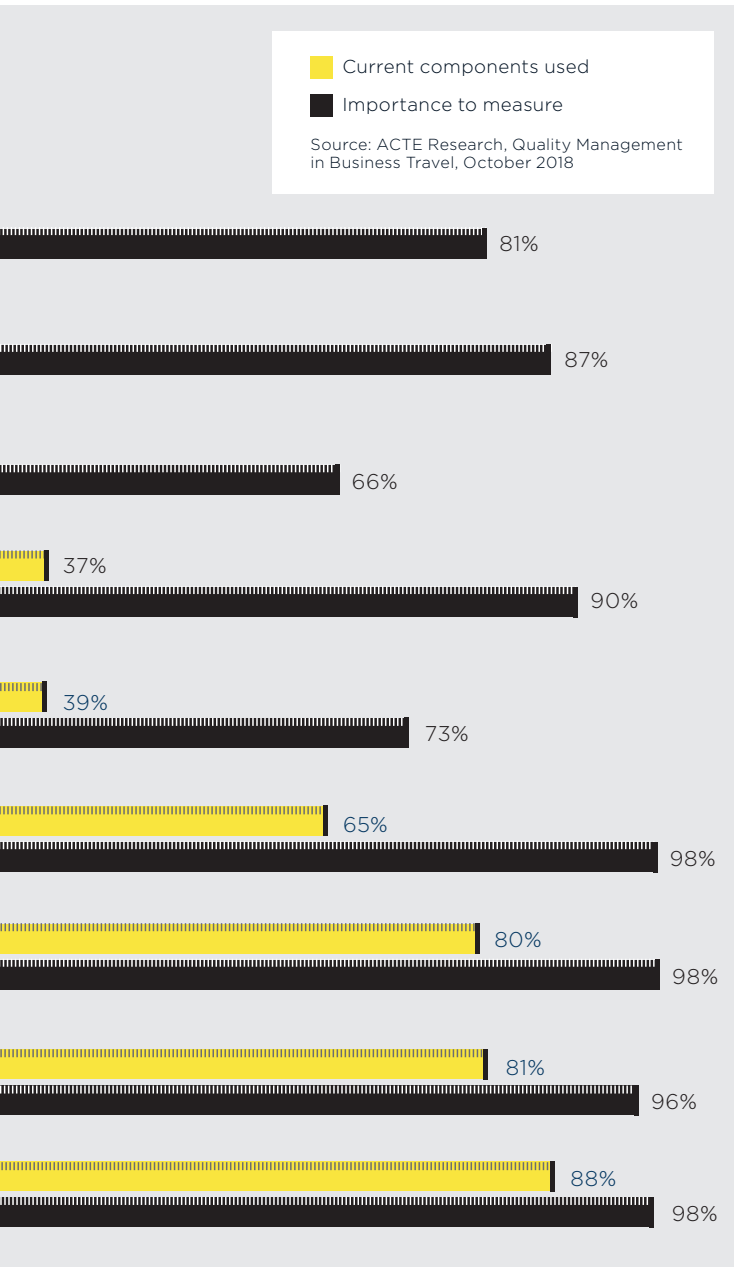


If you have a mature travel programme, you’ll have ticked off the things that a good travel manager is supposed to do. You’ll have consolidated data to find out the true nature of your travel patterns, your key air routes and the suppliers you’re using more than others. You’ll have used that data to consolidate to a lesser number of suppliers and leverage your spend to get better deals.

“

It is incumbent upon travel managers to establish meaningful KPIs that capture not only the numbers but also intangible elements”

Greeley Koch , Executive Director, ACTE Global



Your travel programme's in good shape, but what now? Where do the gradual improvements come from?

Juan-Antonio Iglesias, FCM's Head of Account Management for EMEA, says spend is important but is no longer the only requirement: "A decade ago air spend was the main focus. However, companies are now looking into land

[hotel, car, etc] as new data becomes available," he says.

"Savings are still important for any client - all customers want to optimise their travel spend. However, as programmes mature savings will be lower and lower on a yearly basis. It's more about traveller satisfaction, traveller behaviour, risk management and transforming the travel programme for future industry requirements now."

But "data" is a very broad term - and just having volumes of it doesn't guarantee success.

FCM's specialist data consultancy is provided by its 4th Dimension (4D) team. 4D was launched in Flight Centre Group's native Australia in 2014 and came to the UK last year. The UK launch contributed to the TMC winning Best Sales Account Management Team at the 2019 Business Travel Awards.

4D focuses on gathering data and getting a deep understanding of what it can do.

"It is imperative to distinguish between quality and quantity - as with everything in life," says Iglesias, who acts as divisional leader for 4D in the EMEA region. "Quality data doesn't need gigabytes of detail. One of 4D's main objectives is correct analysis of data, aligning client's culture with

industry trends and the opportunities offered by understanding and influencing traveller behaviour, helping identify saving opportunities and the right supplier strategy."

4D uses Connect, FCM's global reporting tool, to analyse not just the traditional booking data from the TMC, but overall T&E data. This holistic view of spend and behaviour makes advising the right direction of the programme far easier.

With large volumes of data come concerns about data security. A survey of travel managers for the Business Travel Show in early 2019 found that data security was their number three concern after duty of care and traveller wellbeing.

4D's service is built on four pillars. Two pillars relate to data: it will never share a company's data unless the travel manager requests this and promises to protect and secure the information a company shares. This emphasises the importance data now has. The other two pillars relate to 4D acting independently and on a fee basis, so there's no bias introduced through earning commission from preferred suppliers.

4D's Analysis services include cost savings analysis, comparative benchmarking of suppliers, data consolidation from GDSs and non-GDS wider industry sources, demand management and traveller satisfaction ratings.

The benchmark indicators 4D uses include traditional measures such as average air ticket price and average hotel room rate, but also compliance with preferred suppliers and, in recognition of the importance of traveller wellbeing, the number of trips or days away per year compared with industry averages.

Reviewing demand management is also important. Research from 4D suggests focusing on the need and reasons for travel, as well as finding alternatives, can drive as much as 45% of savings within a travel programme, compared with 33% achievable just from analysing suppliers.

One smart way 4D uses data is to provide "Data Snapshots" directly to travellers. In the past, travel management reporting was all about a TMC account manager running a report, sending that to the client, who would use it to identify departments with non-compliant behaviour.

TOP FIVE DATA SOURCES USED TO MEASURE QUALITY FOR TRAVEL PROGRAMMES

Source: ACTE Research, Quality Management in Business Travel, October 2018

The client would then spend precious time searching through all of this data, speaking to the relevant business managers and informing them which travellers were costing the company unnecessarily.

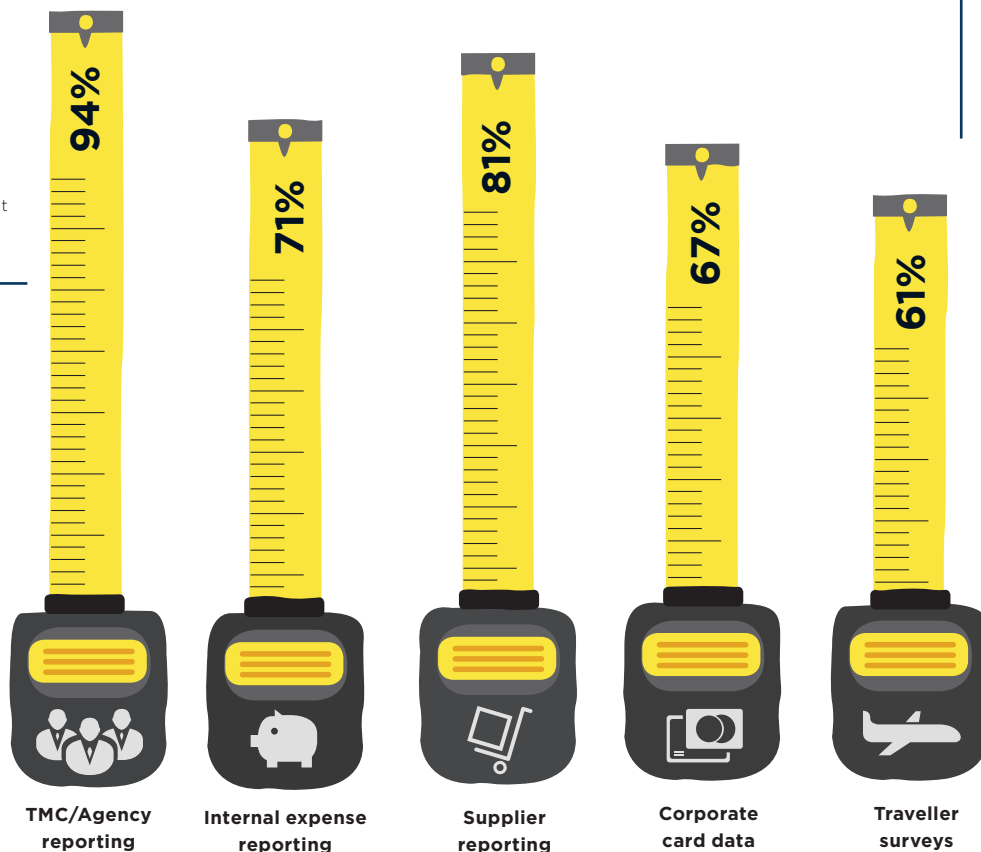
With Data Snapshots, FCM engages the traveller directly with details of their booking behaviour, both positive and negative. Using 'nudges' to congratulate or warn travellers about behaviour keeps them onside with a travel programme.

A typical Snapshot may include the average advance booking window that a particular traveller books in and typical savings or loss that the traveller makes compared to the average within the company. The snapshots also include an element of gamification, showing where the traveller sits within the company in terms of traveller behaviour, thus encouraging the "right" choices.

FCM and 4D also offer free data "health checks" to existing and prospective clients to get a better view of their data.

In the wider world, in the light of the Facebook privacy scandal and the unstoppable rise of tech giants like Google and Amazon, individuals are realising their data has value and needs to be protected and not shared indiscriminately.

The data a company travel programmes generate is also valuable. Yet tapping into it is a much bigger task than unearthing nuggets hidden in the behaviour of individuals. Working with partners like FCM and 4D to analyse the vast and growing volumes of data allows travel managers to unlock the potential of their travel programmes. ■



MAKING EXPENSES CLAIMS SMOOTHER – OR EVEN DISAPPEAR

As onerous tasks go, submitting an expenses claim is right up there along with cleaning the oven. It is often so painful that travellers leave it for months before submitting everything at once. It becomes a vicious circle.

FCM helped one company do something radical – eliminating the need to submit travel expenses at all.

The company, a leading international property and infrastructure group with operations in Australia, Asia, Europe and the Americas, wanted to wean itself off corporate credit cards. The account manager worked closely with the client to establish a feed into the company's mid-office finance system, meaning FCM hands off all data via this feed. The process has been successful and travellers no longer need to submit expenses. This was a first for FCM in terms of handling finance and reporting requirements for a client, and the TMC is now able to offer this process to other clients.

The growth of distribution channels with travellers booking directly with

suppliers via their websites and apps means that companies are having to focus on leakage more than ever.

On the advice of their FCM account management team, one professional services firm notable for its work in turnaround management and performance improvement implemented Concur Connector in an innovative set-up with FCM's Client Bank Connect reporting solution.

The expense reports of the company's travellers are sent to FCM and matched against FCM's own booking data in Client Bank Connect. This enabled FCM to identify how often travellers were booking and paying for hotels via their own travel expenses instead of making hotel bookings through the preferred travel management company. As a result of this initiative FCM was able to reduce leakage from 30% in 2017 to just 12% in 2018.

Smart analysis of data has once again proven to translate into both better traveller experience and lower spend.





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Tools for tomorrow?

Linda Fox looks at the evolution of corporate booking tools



Corporate booking tools have evolved in recent years, responding to business traveller pressure by borrowing functionality from their online leisure cousins.

Developments can be categorised into three areas:

CONTENT

Broadly speaking, business travellers want to be able to access a wide range of content, in a simple way and in the channels they choose. It's up to TMCs, suppliers and technology partners to find ways to do this in the complex environment in which they operate.

The first sign of real acknowledgement of changing traveller behaviour was Concur's move in 2014 to enable TripLink users to book Airbnb content.

Fast forward to today and everybody is finding ways to integrate everyone else from Uber and Starbucks to third party fare alert technology, loyalty programmes and insurance providers.

There are different approaches from various parts of the industry. This includes the creation of marketplaces to access content from 'third parties', or whole platforms dedicated to traditional accommodation as well as new entrants.

The push from travellers to access content similar to what they consume when they travel outside of work is one factor driving change. But the change has been driven to a greater extent by the need of managers to bring this content into the corporate ecosystem. This encourages travellers' compliance to travel policy so that spend data can be collected and duty of care obligations fulfilled.

USER EXPERIENCE

Alongside the push for wider content,

there's also a desire for a better user experience. Corporate travel managers have recognised the challenge of getting their travellers to adopt systems which inherently aren't user-friendly and akin to what they use for leisure travel.

The response from both TMCs and technology providers has been fewer clicks to booking, stored profiles so information needs to be entered only once, the ability to amend bookings easily, and more information to help travellers make a quick decision.

Michel Rouse, Chief Technology Officer, EMEA, for FCM Travel Solutions believes TMCs need to be considering the user experience. He sees increasing demand for simple solutions that enable content to be booked as simply as possible, or even actively proposed based on the context.

Research released last December by the Global Business Travel Association, supported by SAP Concur, reveals that more than 66% of business travellers in Europe have booked with an online travel agency or directly with a supplier.

However, the research also reveals that business travellers plan to use their online booking tool more often in 2019. This could be a nod to the improved

access to content as well as moves by providers to enhance the experience.

One recent development around the user experience is the incorporation of timely messages tailored to company policy, preferred suppliers and traveller preferences. These notifications can pop up throughout the travel journey (from planning to post-booking) and can inform the traveller if there are more optimal solutions available, such as a preferred supplier hotels, or if they might not be within budget.



CHANNELS

The third area where there has been significant development is in the channels with which travellers choose to engage. The industry has already seen a massive shift to mobile; although the actual booking of corporate travel is still catching up, itinerary management and other elements around the trip such as ground transportation and expense capture are increasingly carried out via mobile devices.

Michel Rouse believes traditional self-booking tools are being challenged as the primary booking service.

He says that some companies are moving to an open booking model, while other

emerging channels such as chatbots and the role of artificial intelligence are garnering interest. "Existing tools are still relevant and will be for quite a while. We need to work with them because of the corporate policies and processes that are tied in. Also, some travellers are more comfortable with these tools than a mobile application."

He adds that the industry will gradually migrate to different channels such as WhatsApp and WeChat and "beyond just making sure the buttons are in the right place".

“ The industry will gradually migrate beyond just making sure the buttons are in the right place”

Michel Rouse, Chief Technology Officer, EMEA, FCM Travel Solutions

In the short to medium term, a balance between traditional self-booking tools with improved user interfaces and more content and emerging channels is what we're likely to see. Rapid change might appease millennial travellers coming into the workforce but it might also leave some travellers behind.

TMCs are therefore more likely to adopt an omni-channel booking model offering consistent content and service across different channels. Rouse says that FCM's strategy is to focus on the experience throughout the entire travel

journey or workflow rather than the individual technology components.

Going forward, Rouse sees a blending of portal, mobile and online booking tool into a single user experience. At the front end, users get a seamless experience with the right technology for the task working in the background.

A hybrid of the human touch combined with the latest technology is also likely. Research from Travelport published earlier this year shows travellers are happy with a blend of digital services and human intervention. They see live chat services as the perfect conduit for a blended approach, but acknowledge that accessing information via current mobile technologies can still be "painful".

THE FUTURE

The vision for booking corporate travel will continue to be more simplicity, wider content and integrated services, all accessible in one place, regardless of the channel of access or the device be used. These are probably the only elements that will remain constant and the industry will have to adapt around them.

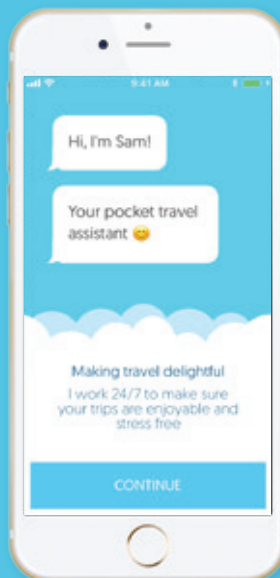
Websites may become obsolete as travellers run their lives from a chat platform or search engine accessing all the services they need in their work and home lives. Or, they might turn to devices such as Google Home or Amazon Alexa and use voice technology to research and book travel.

Personalisation will also play an increasing role but not in an intrusive way. Companies and services will capture data and use it, not in a creepy way, but to make the corporate traveller's life easier, by offering them things they know they like, will shine.

The future is bright. ■

SEEQA

Your Global Travel Platform



Going forward, Michel Rouse sees a blending of portal, mobile and online booking tool into a single user experience. Whereas today users need to navigate between Hub, Seeqa and Sam, in tomorrow's world they will have a seamless experience across multiple channels. Users will no longer need to think about which product to use for which function, but will simply go to their desktop or mobile interface and start performing a task.

Sam:]

TOP STORY

Introducing **Sam:]** your pocket travel assistant

Sam:], FCM's ground-breaking "Smart Assistant for Mobile" for business travellers has been launched in the Middle East. It blends a powerful mix of artificial intelligence with the expertise of real FCM travel consultants, providing business travellers with personalised information about their trip via a chat-based interface on their mobile device.

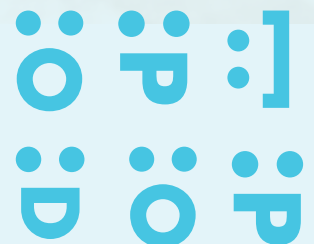
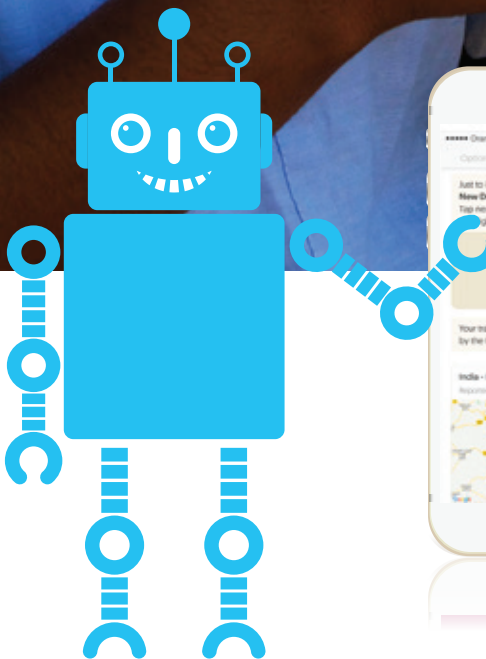
The highly interactive, travel-savvy app assists business travellers before, during and after a trip with everything from itinerary management, air and hotel bookings and flight updates to local city and country information, local weather reports, driving directions and security alerts.

Two levels of Sam:] are now available and can be downloaded via the App Store and Google Play:

- a basic free version that enables any user to add their trips manually, view weather, traffic and flight alerts, and connects with local ground transport options
- a premium version, exclusively for FCM customers with additional features, including auto-synching the traveller's bookings, integrated self-booking tool, live chat with an FCM consultant to provide service and make or amend bookings on the move; and the option for the user to 'share location' as part of a mobile duty of care feature.

Ciarán Kelly, Managing Director UAE, FCM Travel Solutions said: "As a leading global TMC, FCM is pioneering game-changing business travel technology - we are excited to announce that Sam:] is available to our clients' travellers in the Middle East. We believe there's a genuine need to support business travellers on the move. Sam:] aggregates all the information a traveller needs in one place at the point when the user needs it, offering a seamless end-to-end experience across all aspects of travel."

Search FCM Sam



FCM GAINS GREAT PLACE TO WORK STATUS

FCM Travel Solutions UAE is proud to announce that it has been certified as a Great Place to Work® after a thorough and independent analysis conducted by Great Place to Work® Institute United Arab Emirates.

This certification is based on direct feedback from FCM employees, provided as part of an extensive and anonymous survey about the workplace experience. FCM's committed to a great workplace culture in the region

as the company firmly believes this sets the tone for how staff interact, not only with one another, but also with clients and suppliers. FCM's philosophy is to create an environment where people enjoy and look forward to their working day, and where teamwork and job satisfaction are valued.



Alexa Georgiannis, Online Implementation Manager and Ciarán Kelly, Managing Director UAE collect FCM's Great Place to Work Award

FCM TRAVEL SPONSORS GULF SUSTAINABILITY AND CSR AWARDS

As a leading global travel management company, FCM aims to set an example in terms of CSR. Giving back to the community is a core ingredient of our corporate culture. FCM UAE was therefore proud to be a sponsorship partner at the at the Gulf Sustainability and CSR Awards. These awards provide recognition for companies and individuals implementing outstanding CSR and sustainability initiatives across the region.

The event was much more than just an awards ceremony; all of the companies and individuals involved are helping to raise the bar when it comes to sustainability and to increase the awareness of the importance of CSR. Congratulations to the winners!

WOMEN WISE INITIATIVE LAUNCHED IN UAE

An initiative established by a group of senior female leaders at FCM's parent company, Flight Centre Travel Group, has been launched in the UAE.

Women Wise aims to inspire all women by showcasing opportunity, providing role-models and offering structured support to create gender balance in all leadership teams across the company.

FCM UAE has set up a committee of five staff members to spearhead the initiative, led by Sunaina Lall, HR Executive. "Our vision for Women Wise in the UAE is to encourage more women into our business, increasing the percentage from 27% currently, to 40% by the end of 2020," she said.

On International Women's Day, FCM's female staff and leaders

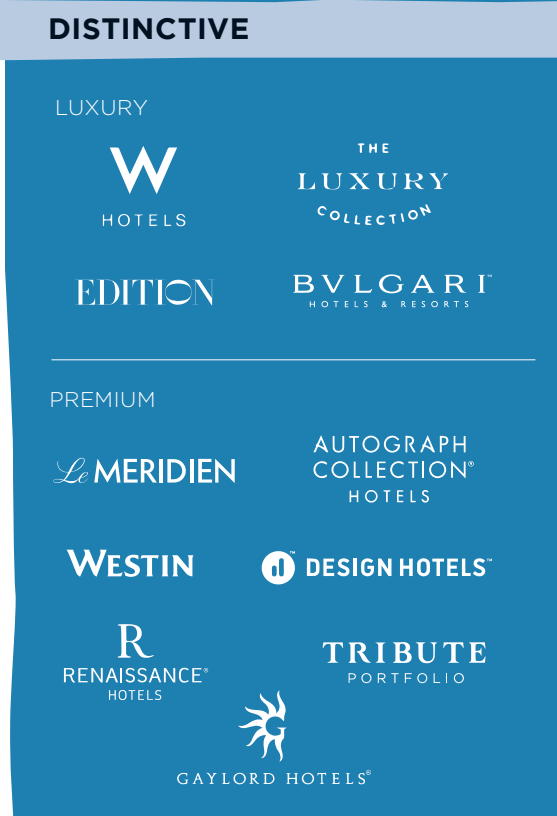
gathered to share stories of inspirational women in their lives.

"We are aiming to organise meetings like this on a quarterly basis, when we can discuss the challenges faced by women at work in this region and how FCM as a business can help to ensure the workplace is more women-friendly. We have already assigned a nursing room for returning new mothers and are looking at offering mentorship programmes and health check days," explained Lall.



Room to manoeuvre

With more accommodation options available than ever, and travellers' wanting a say in the choice, what's a travel manager to do?



Rachel Newns, Head of Accommodation Programme Management at FCM, sums up the challenge with a story.

“I was talking to a client about considering a programme with Accor. I realised from the look on her face that ‘Accor’ meant nothing to her. But when I said ‘Novotel’, she was completely with me.”

The days when business travellers stayed at a Hilton and Hilton was the company with whom you negotiated a corporate deal are history. Accor, Hilton and IHG all have a double-digit clutch of brands, while Marriott, since its merger with Starwood, tops the hotel brand league table with 30.

The explosion in the availability of data in the past decade has enabled suppliers to understand better what experience makes which groups feel comfortable. The result has been a growth in brands as accommodation

“
Hotels generally reward those who spend the most with them”

Rachel Newns, FCM Head of Accommodation Programme Management

suppliers refine their offerings to target specific groups of travellers.

As Rachel says: “The brands are all obviously being brought out so that hotel companies can compete at a much more specialised level. Gone are the days when every location you travelled to was covered by a named hotel. It’s now a much more focused approach.”

It’s no accident that the number of brands is growing at the same time that travellers themselves have much more

access to content. With large third-party hotel content aggregators so present online and travellers’ having devices that give them 24/7 access at their fingertips, it’s not surprising that corporate travellers believe they’re experts in finding and booking stays.

How can the travel manager combine delivering the corporate objective of providing suitable and safe accommodation and the best experience possible at the best price possible for travelling staff with their increasing desire for autonomy over where they stay?

As the travellers’ approach matures, so too must that of the buyer and the travel management company.

Brands are able to compete for the actual travellers at a much more specialised level. The diagram (above) shows how Marriott tried to explain its property network to staff after the Starwood merger, keeping it simple and assigning each to a box according to



SELECT



LONGER STAYS



element

style (classic or distinctive) and price bracket (luxury, premium, select).

All six boxes are home for multiple brands, eg both Le Meridien and Autograph are “Distinctive, Premium”. But that’s a lot for a travel manager and the TMC acting on its behalf to contend with.

Getting the best price requires a nuanced approach. Rachel advises clients to focus on their high-volume destinations – those where there are offices or where big projects are on – and negotiate directly with individual properties in those locations.

“It’s about working with the individual hotel to find the best opportunity,” she says.

As well as getting a good room rate, a direct negotiation with a property is an opportunity to negotiate on extras, such as breakfast and the kind of wi-fi (the upgraded version rather than just the standard offering). High volume accounts have been known to get airport transfers or transfers to the actual work site included.

But most transient travel programmes also require accommodation in destinations that aren’t visited very often. In such cases there’s not a lot for either the supplier or the buyer/traveller to bargain with but there is for the hotel company that owns or manages them.

Rachel has a tip for buyers: “In these locations, try to consolidate spend

through a single supplier rather than negotiating with individual properties.”

Adding together room nights in different brands in different locations might very well be another 2,000 rooms in the UK for large hotel companies like Hilton or Marriott. A travel management company should be able to negotiate a discount off the BAR (best available rate) for properties booked by the corporate, or its travellers, with any brand within a hotel group.

“You should typically expect a negotiated rate to be 17-22% cheaper than BAR and include some benefits such as not paying for breakfast as well,” she says.

Of course, this only works if the traveller chooses to book a brand within a group with which the corporate has such an agreement - and books it in a way that that booking can be identified as being from the company which owns the agreement.

As Rachel says: “If a traveller is booking outside a managed platform, we can’t track it to get a discount.”

Travellers have become used to comparative shopping, having access to content and rates from different hotels, and want that experience replicated in their corporate booking experience.

For their part corporates clearly want compliance to obtain maximum benefit from those negotiated rates and valuable data. Some accomplish this

by mandating preferred booking channels or prioritising named hotels but others fix rate caps within destinations, giving travellers autonomy so long as the rate does not exceed a given figure.

“If you can improve travellers’ loyalty to a chain, maybe by using their rewards scheme, you can improve stickiness of your hotel programme,” she advises. “Loyalty can see the traveller moving up grades of a loyalty programme to get room upgrades and other benefits which make the traveller more comfortable and save the company money.”

Direct business has a cheaper cost of sale than bookings through an intermediary so hotel companies do target travellers but corporates only meet corporate governance obligations and get control when bookings go through a central platform.

The supplier does the fulfilment but TMCs such as FCM undertake a lot of other work involved in a booking on their behalf. “We’re managing clients with making confirmations, changes, requests and payments so we’re bringing value to the transaction,” says Rachel.

“Travel is getting more and more complicated, hotel rates are more complex and hotels are improving their revenue management tools constantly. Our job is to understand this market – a customer’s needs, culture, objectives, what the traveller demands when travelling for business, take the information and deliver a programme that will sit with the corporate requirements.”

Hotels like clients that have value. If an account manager has an understanding of a customer’s value, that can help sell the relationship and reap benefits for customers when they begin working with a new property. But that new property is likely to be part of an old hotel company. ■



“Hotels can be a very emotive subject. Where you stay is very personal”

Rachel News, FCM Head of Accommodation Programme Management

DOING BUSINESS IN

Riyadh

Saudi Arabia has been an independent country for only a little more than a century, but its capital Riyadh's history stretches back more than a millennium.



Four Seasons Riyadh



Historical relics such as the Masmak Fortress rub shoulders with giant skyscrapers, such as the Kingdom and Al Faisaliah Centres, which are emblematic of Riyadh's status as one of the wealthiest cities in the world.

✈ GETTING THERE

Emirates, Saudia and Flynas operate daily direct flights between Dubai and Riyadh's King Khalid International Airport. British Airways and Saudia also each operate a daily direct flight between London Heathrow and King

Khalid International Airport. Flights to and from other UK and Irish destinations will require a connection.

🏠 STAYING AND EATING THERE

Skyscrapers dominate the central business district skyline. A few amazing hotels are within two of them, the Al Faisaliah and Kingdom Centres. A business traveller staying at one of these properties has easy access to the city's banks and other business headquarters.

The **Al Faisaliah**, a Rosewood Hotel and a member of Leading Hotels of the World, is in the Al Faisaliah Centre

along with luxury shops and an office tower. It describes itself as "Riyadh's most sophisticated hotel," and would be suitable for any CEO travelling on business. Its Globe Lounge has spectacular views, and it's the only luxury hotel in Riyadh to offer suites.

Riyadh's **Four Seasons** offers all the comfort and luxury you would expect from the brand within the distinctive location of the Kingdom Centre. It's near

all the significant business sites in Riyadh, and there's even a "males only" spa for businessmen travelling. The property's **Elements** restaurant offers breakfast, lunch and an a la carte menu, where chefs at live cooking stations in an open kitchen create dishes representing many international cuisines.

The Kingdom and Al Faisaliah Centres and the International Convention and Exhibition Centre are also within reach of the **Narcissus Hotel**, which is located at the corner of Tahlia and Olaya Streets in the heart of Riyadh's business and financial district. This high-tech property has everything that a seasoned business traveller would expect from an international, luxury property - including a luxurious spa, swimming pool and gym.

The **Sheraton Riyadh** is the ultimate business hotel for business travellers who want some extremely comfortable accommodation without being ostentatious. It is in the heart of the city centre and offers every amenity and business facility that most travellers would need or appreciate. It also provides an extensive breakfast buffet which includes many Mediterranean and Middle Eastern dishes, as well as customary European fare.

The **Ritz-Carlton Riyadh** isn't located in the business district but in the diplomatic quarter and is both a leisure and business hotel. It is ideal for meetings as it is located next to the King Abdulaziz Convention Centre. The property also has its own lavish meetings facilities which host high-profile events such as the Future Investment Initiative which has a global reputation for attracting the movers and shakers of international finance.



INSIDER'S TIP

Fikri Shehab, FCM Saudi Arabia

Prayers are held five times a day for 10-30 minutes, during which all service areas such as malls, restaurants and other outlets, stop working. During the holy month of Ramadan, it is advisable to respect the traditions of the country and not eat or drink in public.

It is advisable to respect the local customs and traditions for clothing, specifically for women during shopping or tourist trips. Women must wear conservative, loose-fitting clothes, particularly a full-length cloak (abaya). Men wearing shorts are not allowed to enter shopping malls or public institutions.

It is illegal and prohibited by law to sell, buy, or use alcoholic drinks and drugs.

It is important to do your research before visiting public places such as museums, parks and zoos, because there are different visiting hours for families, women, and unmarried people.



EATING AND DRINKING

It might seem odd to go to a Japanese restaurant in Saudi Arabia but **Nozomi** has not only great food but private dining areas which are perfect for business meetings.

If you're looking to impress a client, **Spazio's** location - on the 77th floor of the Kingdom Tower - will guarantee a great view while savouring the lobster risotto. Its guest book boasts entries from many big names including Nicolas Sarkozy, Bill Clinton and Tony Blair. Its menu is nominally Italian but also includes international dishes.

The business traveller who is looking for food from the region might try the well-established Armenian restaurant with an excellent reputation, **Lusin**.

GETTING AROUND

The fastest and most accessible way of getting around the city is by taxi. They are abundant in Riyadh and reasonably priced. Drivers will usually use the meter if the passenger doesn't negotiate a fixed price. But you can also make use of ride-hailing apps Uber and Careem (recently purchased by Uber).

TIME OFF

If you're looking for things to do during your down time, why not check out the 19th Century Masmak Fortress? With its thick walls and four watchtowers, it's in the centre of Riyadh and has a beautiful palm tree gate with an opening big enough only for one person.

The National Museum has the largest collection of Arabian Peninsula artifacts, scriptures and antiquities in the Middle East.

Horses are popular in the Kingdom so not surprisingly the King Abdulaziz Race Track is a popular weekend destination. ■

Is it worth a premium?

Catherine Chetwynd explores why more carriers are making the fourth cabin part of their new three-cabin configurations

Premium economy class hits all the right corporate notes: it falls in line with cost containment requirements and still caters for traveller wellbeing. This is reflected in the growth of these cabins, both in number - more airlines are introducing them - and in the percentage of the aircraft they represent. In British Airways' new A350s, there will be the same number of premium economy seats as there will be business class.

But BA is not alone in upping the ante; American Airlines is removing eight business class seats from its B787-8 Dreamliners, reducing the premium cabin to seat just 20. The airline is making the move in order to add 28 premium economy seats to its biggest aircraft. Premium economy's smaller, but still aspirational. Seat pitch and width allow carriers to fill the space with more passengers, and today's premium economy seats do not too different from the business class seat of the 1980s.

In fact, where a three-cabin format of first, business and economy was standard back then, it is fast becoming the norm now. The names have changed to business, premium economy and economy, however. Airlines hope to seduce passengers into trading up from economy, rather than downgrading from business class, which may explain why the name includes the word "economy", though exceptions include BA's World Traveller Plus, United's Premium Plus and Delta's Premium Select.

The cabin is also a money-spinner for the airlines. Where many business and first class passengers have used loyalty points to upgrade economy class tickets, premium economy passengers have voted with their wallet - corporate or otherwise - and the ever-squeezed economy class cabins are fighting a rear-guard action against low-cost carriers (LCC). Premium economy fares are generally half those charged for a business class seat, and two to three times more than economy.

“
Today's premium economy seats don't look too different from the business class seat of the 1980s”

For the traveller, the benefits are worthwhile: more comfortable seats - generally a minimum pitch of 38 inches and recline of 7 inches - plus leg and foot rests, though not always integral. For example, Cathay Pacific has leg and foot rest in one, BA has a leg rest but the foot rest drops down from the seat in front.

Better food and beverage, an amenity kit, bigger choice of entertainment with noise cancelling headphones and quality screens are also part of the deal. And priority check-in, security

clearance, boarding and bag handling add to the comfort factor.

The first of these services was launched in 2007, but there is still a raft of newcomers entering the mix. Emirates has announced the introduction of a premium economy cabin in 2020, with around 56 seats on its new A380s and up to 28 on B777s, while other aircraft will be retro-fitted. This is largely in response to financial pressures from competitors, a greater number of low-cost carriers on medium and long-haul routes, and the increasing likelihood that there will soon be planes that will fly some of the world's longest journeys point-to-point, eating into hub traffic.

In 2021, Finnair's premium economy cabin makes its debut, and Swiss's service will comprise 24 seats on B774-300ER aircraft, eventually extending to the entire long-haul fleet.

US carriers also entered the fray relatively late. American Airlines led the way in 2016 and now provides premium economy on most of its wide-bodied transatlantic aircraft. Delta Premium Select took flight in 2017 on A350s, and B777s are now being fitted. And United Airlines' Premium Plus became available on flights from Saturday 30 March 2019.

To mark its centenary year, British Airways has announced a £6.5bn investment plan, which includes new furnishings, service, amenity kits and an improved menu in World Traveller

United Airlines



Plus, which will be introduced this year. Enhanced seats will include adjustable leg, foot and headrest, and will be available on BA's A350s.

Cathay Pacific launched premium economy in 2012 to bridge the gap between business class flat beds and economy. On average, 10% of seats on B777-300ERs and A350s are dedicated to the service, the latter featuring the improved second generation.

The premium economy cabin accounts for 8% of Philippine Airlines' capacity. UK country manager, David Cochrane says it's particularly popular with "corporate customers who no longer approve business class travel for their employees".

Unusually, Singapore Airlines runs a two-cabin service on flights between New York Newark to Singapore, with just premium economy and business class; otherwise, the cabin represents around 9% of any aircraft but that's set to change. According to SIA's General Manager UK & Ireland, Sheldon Hee,

"on the basis that our newest A30 aircraft, which began flying in December 2017, has a higher number of premium economy seats than our other aircraft types, arguably we do see demand growing."

Lufthansa launched its premium economy cabin in 2014 so has witnessed first-hand the significant growth in demand among corporate clients. This is probably directly related to the additional rest that a passenger is likely to get as a result of 5-7 inches more legroom. The number of seats in Lufthansa's premium economy cabin can vary from 21 on A330s to 52 on its Airbus A380s. It is available on numerous services to destinations in North and South America, as well as Asia.

Air France launched in 2009, however since then the premium economy market has grown by more than 400%. The service takes up some 9% of the airlines long-haul capacity - and from January this year, the airline's latest generation seats have been appearing

on the airline's A330s, giving a 40in pitch and 130° recline, against the original 38in and 123°.

Hot competition ensures that standards in premium economy continue to rise - and this reflects enduring corporate demand. The service strikes the right chord both financially, and in service levels, which is a rare combination. ■

Philippine Airlines



HOW DO THE AIRLINES COMPARE?

Airline	Premium economy cabin name	Seat pitch/recline (in)	% of seat capacity ¹	Benefits in the air	Benefits on the ground
Air Canada	Premium Economy	38/7	N/A	Better F&B, adjustable head rest, 11in screen on B787-8, 8.9in on A330-333	Priority check-in, boarding and baggage handling, 2 23kg bags
Air France	Premium Economy	40/130° (new, A330) 38in/123° (old)	8-9%	Fixed shell seat, better F&B, 13.3in screen, adjustable foot, leg and head rests	Fast track, 29kg luggage allowance, unlimited digital press
American Airlines	Premium Economy	38/6	N/A	Better F&B, enhanced amenity kit	Priority boarding
British Airways	World Traveller Plus	38/8	N/A	Better F&B, screen size varies according to aircraft, leg and foot rest, 12in screen	Priority boarding, 2 23kg bags, meal pre-ordering
Cathay Pacific	Premium Economy	40/9 ²	8-12.3%	Better F&B, leg and foot rest, 12.1in. ² screen, full leg rest	Dedicated check-in, priority boarding, 2 35kg bags
Delta	Premium Select	38/7	N/A	Better F&B, TUMI amenity kit, 13.3in screen, adjustable leg and head rest	Sky Priority, including faster check-in and security clearance, priority boarding and baggage, 2 32kg bags
Lufthansa	Premium Economy	38/8	6-11%	Amenity kit, foot rest, 11-12in screen	2 23kg bags
Philippine Airlines	Premium Economy	38/8	8%	Better F&B, 13.3in screen, leg and foot rests; free unlimited Wifi on the A350	Priority check-in and boarding, 1 35kg bag
Singapore Airlines	Premium Economy	38/8	9%	Better F&B, 13.3in screen, leg and foot rest, headrest wings	Priority check-in & baggage handling, 1 35kg bag, meal pre-ordering
United Airlines	Premium Plus	38/6	6.5-9%	Better F&B, 13in screen, leg and foot rests	Premier Access check-in, priority boarding, discounted entrance to United Club lounges, 2 23kg bags
Virgin Atlantic	Premium	38/8	N/A	Better F&B, new afternoon tea, Wonder Wall social space with self-serve snacks and soft drinks	Seat selection, priority check-in and boarding, fast bag drop

Notes:

¹Figures are approximate and vary per aircraft

²Measurements are for second generation seats on A350

Source: as provided by individual airlines cited

FCM UAE visits Dubai Centre for Special Needs



In May, the FCM UAE office collected and donated several bags of clothes to local special needs charity, Dubai Centre for Special Needs (dcsneeds.com). DCSN aims to serve the diverse academic, physical, social and emotional needs of its students, and all aspects of the organisation's curriculum and activities are child-centered, designed to assist individual learning styles to achieve success.

FCM UAE employees also visited the Centre, to see first-hand some of the great work the team at DCSN does. The organisation seeks to enhance the quality of life of individuals with special needs and their families, by offering high quality, effective community-based programs and social support services.



WHAT'S COOKING IN SOWETO?

Ground has been broken on building a new kitchen at the Qhoboheane Primary School in Soweto, Johannesburg, part of FCM and parent company Flight Centre's 'Adopt a School' initiative. But unfortunately it hasn't been an easy task.

As soon as the team began to dig the foundations, flooding occurred due to unforeseen high water levels below the school. Engineers were consulted who advised that foundation trenches needed to be a further 300mm deep and filled with additional G5 base material. The good news is that this material has been sourced and work on the foundations is continuing.

The much-needed new kitchen will replace the current facilities of a stove and sink in a shipping container, where lunch is prepared for almost 500 pupils a day – for some it's their only meal.

Yet more good news is that the vegetable garden that will provide fresh produce for the kitchen is thriving. The next group of FCM and Flight Centre staff volunteers heading to Soweto will continue planting and tending the garden.





If you can spare 10 minutes, you can **change** the world

Approximately 18% of the world's population has no access to electricity – which equates to 1.4 billion people living in the dark. This severely impacts education, health, the economy and the environment. SolarBuddy's mission is to help break this cycle and improve the educational opportunities of six million children living in darkness, by providing them with solar lights to study after dusk.

Over the last year, delegates and staff attending various FCM conferences and events have been building SolarBuddy lights as part of the conference programme and you can the same. Each kit comes with instructions, and the lights take around 10 minutes to make.



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Group therapy

Managing group travel isn't as simple as it sounds

One's company, two's a crowd and three's a party, according to Andy Warhol. But what constitutes a group? And when a group needs to get from A to B, the term used is 'group travel' - but what does that mean?

Group travel has a tendency to evoke bland images of coach trips traditionally favoured by the older generation. Yet in reality there is nothing bland or traditional about organising group travel nowadays in both the MICE and business travel sector. There is, in fact, no single definition of 'group travel'. That is why FCM's sister division, cievventr, is setting out to redefine group travel depending on each client's bespoke requirements.

"On the face of it, group travel sounds simple - but there is a great deal of complexity to organising it. It could involve 50 delegates all travelling on the same flight from the same departure airport to the same destination, or it could be 50 people all travelling from





“
When it comes to integrating online booking tools with delegate registration platforms for group travel purposes, cievents is leading the way”

George Turner, cievents Business Leader Group Travel



different locations to one event,” explains George Turner, Business Leader Group Travel at cievents. “Likewise, the group size can vary from 10 people up to 10,000, depending on the type of event, or reason for travel. Group travel also can’t be pigeon-holed when it comes to visibility of spend and reporting, as it straddles a company’s

“
Group travel can’t be pigeon-holed when it comes to visibility of spend and reporting - it straddles a company’s business travel programme as well as its meetings programme”

George Turner, cievents Business Leader Group Travel

business travel programme as well as its meetings programme.”

cievents has seen unprecedented growth of its group travel business over the last 12 months thanks to the bespoke approach its dedicated group travel team takes with each client, as well as the team’s expertise in negotiating competitive flights and consolidating corporate and group travel spend.

Now cievents is taking its group travel expertise to new heights with the launch of ground-breaking technology solutions that will enhance and streamline its customers’ group booking experience significantly, all accessed via a single Travel Portal.

The option for delegates to book their own group flights via the Travel Portal is an industry first, as cievents integrated an online booking tool with its event registration technology. This means the delegates register for an event via cievents’ Travel Portal, clicking through to the online booking tool to self-book their own flights. They can either specify dates and departures or select from pre-agreed options. Once flights have been booked, the details are

populated within the delegate’s profile. The tool also offers variable payment options as bookings can be billed-back via cievents, or the delegate can pay at the time of booking on a credit card.

“We are leading the way when it comes to integrating online booking tools with delegate registration platforms for group travel purposes,” says Turner. “Most TMCs and agencies are still managing group travel bookings via

labour-intensive Excel spreadsheets and emails to individual delegates. Our online option is a slick, easy solution as delegates feel that they have more choice and control over their booking, while event organisers can log in and have up-to-date visibility of which delegates have booked which flights at any time, enabling them to track costs and manage reporting more effectively.”

Alternatively instead of the online booking option, clients can choose from two other service levels to meet their group travel needs. The first is ‘Concierge’, whereby delegates register online for the event via Travel Portal, but cievents group travel team liaise with the individual delegates offline to arrange flights as the client requires a personal approach to booking travel for each individual. There is also the ‘Agent Assist’ option, whereby delegates still register via Travel Portal, but cievents allocates flights based on options pre-agreed with the client’s organiser.

“Our aim with these new online and offline servicing options, or a hybrid of either of them, is to demonstrate our versatility and understanding that each client’s requirements for group travel is different. Ultimately, we want to make the complexities of group travel as simple and streamlined as possible for our client’s organisers and their delegates,” sums up Turner. ■

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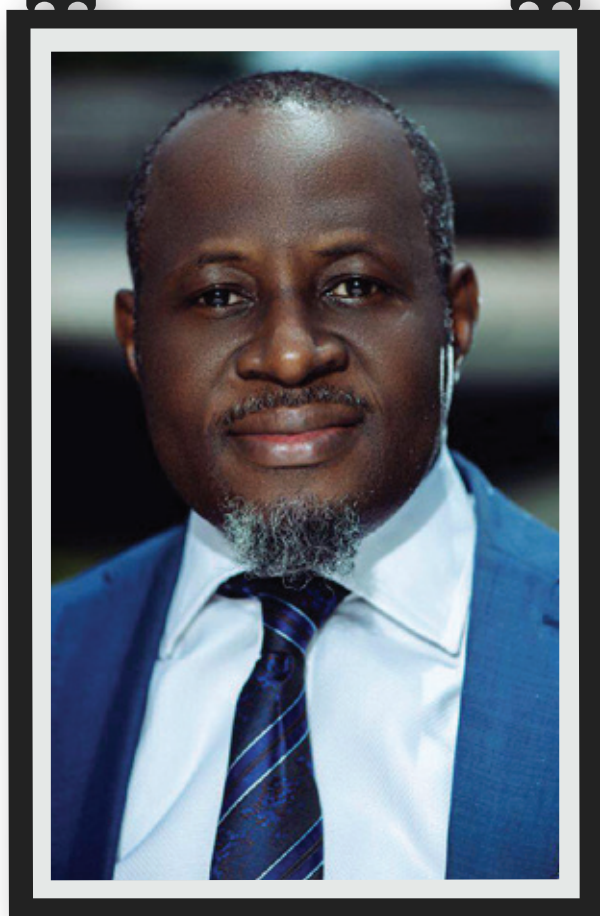
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Is data the travel industry's unicorn?

The head of FCM Nigeria is on a mission to update local attitudes towards data consolidation and analytics

Bankole Bernard is a busy man. The managing director of FCM Nigeria is back in the office after a day-long meeting for NANTA, the National Association of Nigeria Travel Agencies, of which he is the president.

At a time when leisure and business travel are merging into 'bleisure', and travellers' expectations - whether from technology or their leisure travels - are blurring, this understanding of the broader picture is invaluable.

Nigeria's travel agents and TMCs are facing some common issues, one of which is data. The lack of cohesive systems for data consolidation and analysis is a concern.

"It's difficult for TMCs," he says. "The challenge is that all you get is raw data. We need a company that can collate the data of travellers in this country. My recommendation would be simple. We need a databank. In Europe and the UK you can book the air segment over the GDS, and consequently have joint data information."

Bernard argues that such a central depository of travel data from different sources is essential for fact-based decision-making.

“
There's no clear distinction between a TMC and a normal travel agency”

Bankole Bernard, Head of FCM Nigeria

"Without data we can't take decisions about what travel should be about," he says. Nor can suppliers. "If a new airline wants to come into the country, there is no point where you can get information. If we had a central data point, we could know things like the total amount of travel in March."

Travel is important everywhere but especially in a country like Nigeria where most of what is produced is

exported and, consequently, the level of imports is very high. High levels of trade mean that the volumes of business travel in Nigeria are high and will remain so.

This makes the lack of data particularly frustrating.

The scarcity of travel data is further compounded by the fact that bleisure is popular in Nigeria, as most travellers mix their leisure and business travel.

"It's difficult to separate leisure travel from business travel," says Bernard. This makes it challenging to collect data which accurately represents the business element of the trip. It's a challenge that is especially frustrating for companies such as FCM Nigeria who aim to provide clients, both multinationals and more local businesses, with state-of-the-art travel management.

"It is extremely difficult to say this is your travel spend on training, on MICE, on ordinary business. Everything is lumped together."

Such awareness of the importance of data to find appropriate solutions for

individual clients' travel programmes may very well be linked to Bernard's background as an economist. It certainly gives him an enormous head start in tackling the specific challenges of travel management.

He concedes that the level of professionalism in travel management in Nigeria is not what it is in Europe and North America. The inability to provide the same level of data reporting and consultancy services means that the distinction between a TMC and a normal travel agency isn't understood, and the level of awareness of TMCs in the market is low.

“It's difficult to separate leisure travel from business travel”

Bankole Bernard, Head of FCM Nigeria

TMCs also face other challenges in Nigeria. Travel costs tend to be higher than in comparable countries because of issues such as the difficulty in creating a full trip itinerary on the same booking channel. Hotels are usually booked on different platforms than air.

In addition, the cost of doing business itself in Nigeria is high and becomes a factor putting upward pressure on any fee ultimately negotiated and accepted.

BSP - IATA's settlement system by which its clearinghouse automatically withdraws money from agents' accounts to pay airlines for the flights booked - takes payment in Nigeria every two weeks. At the same time, normal credit terms for clients are 30-60 days with, according to Bernard, 90 days not being an unusual practice for many Nigerian companies.

This means there's a constant cost to maintaining cash flow. Finding funds for investment in new client services can be tricky. Bernard explains: "If I want to offer reporting, I need the right tools which will be an additional cost for the business. For clients there will be a cost in adopting a quality service. But many clients don't feel the need.

"When it gets to Africa or Nigeria, you compromise on quality of service."

The state of regulation is also a challenge in Nigeria. According to

Bernard, both IAIA and non-IATA airlines are on the GDS, so agents must deal with a lot of stray segments.

The head of NANTA has a clear strategy of what he feels needs be achieved in Nigeria:

"A lot has to be done: awareness needs to be raised and booking fees introduced. We need to promote professionalism in the travel industry; and every agency should guarantee an assurance of quality."

Professionalism is a word that all our marketing teams teach us to roll off our tongues but there is a big gap between talking about it and achieving it.

Bernard is acutely aware of the benefits that slick travel management can deliver - but to do that he's trying to lead the market in differentiating their leisure and business offerings and have a kitemark to convey that specific quality standards have been achieved.

He feels that fees for services must be introduced so that proper reporting tools are implemented. The data then obtained could be analysed to identify savings and inform negotiations.

There are a lot of challenges and issues, but steps are underway to ensure that travel management in Nigeria is as slick as it is anywhere. ■

FCM CONNECT
TECHNOLOGY THAT MOVES YOU

FCM CONNECT
The local travel profiles and habits may mean that travel data in Nigeria is often lumped together but FCM Nigeria's multinational customers have the advantage of being able to access 'Connect', FCM's reporting and analytics platform.

Connect, which has been available globally for nearly 10 years, offers on-demand reporting and detailed overviews from a wide range of data feeds and customisable sources.

Travel managers can consolidate multinational data to monitor their programme's performance across markets. According to Ciarán Kelly, Middle East & Africa regional leader for FCM, this gives them "increased capability to tailor and customise booking and financial data to build their own reports and dashboards and the ability to better manage supplier relationships."

He adds: "They can also gain an insight into booking behaviour to refine policies and identify opportunities to improve programme performance."

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