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– Christian Spangenberg, Area Manager for Key Account Management & Sales,
DER Business Travel/SYNERGI / SYNERGI Germany



INDUSTRY

Business Travel Services

WEBEX APPLICATION

Meeting Center

SUMMARY

DER Business Travel/SYNERGI provides its customers an online reservation system, enabling them to bypass the usual travel agency service fees. DER Business Travel/SYNERGI uses the WebEx Web conferencing system to reduce its own travel costs significantly

ABOUT DER

Business Travel/SYNERGI

Line of Business

Business travel reservation and management; Internet-based online reservation system

Headquarters

Frankfurt am Main, Germany

Number of Employees

800

WebEx Customer since 2003

Web conferencing as a cost-saving application

DER Business Travel/SYNERGI has close to 800 employees focused exclusively on business travel services. It operates around 100 business travel centres, 42 of which are located at industrial customer sites, and seven airport service counters. The company has an annual turnover of over 550 million Euros.

DER Business Travel/SYNERGI uses the business travel reservation and management system Phoenix BT, which it developed itself and also provides its business customers an Internet-based online reservation system called Global TR@C. DER Business Travel/SYNERGI is a member of the international group Synergi Global Travel Management and has access to a global technological platform that enables cross-country consolidation of data from various reservation systems.

The Challenge

Consumers are sometimes a step ahead of companies. They've been booking trips conveniently online for years and are saving money like never before. Business travel usually means assigning tasks to an assistant, arranging details on the telephone, sending tickets, confirmations and vouchers by post, handing over documents to the employees travelling, and checking and forwarding invoices to the manager or accounting department. It's not exactly convenient.

Not only is the traditional way of making reservations time-consuming, it is also expensive. Human resources aren't free, and the travel agency has to make its commission. Many companies have realised that the line has to be drawn somewhere. Large companies in particular are just starting out when it comes to using e-commerce and online tools for travel management.

"There is a lot of money at stake", says

Christian Spangenberg, Area Manager for Key Account Management & Sales at DER Business Travel/SYNERGI in Frankfurt, Germany. "Companies in Germany spend significantly more than 50 billion Euros for business travel each year. That's about as much as Germans spend on holidays. Whereas holidays are becoming shorter, overnight stays on business trips are on the rise. The number of business trips has decreased, but business travellers are on the road longer."

Particularly in light of the economic dry spell in recent years, companies have pulled in the reins on business travel spending. Assistants were charged with finding less expensive airlines, reserving seats in Economy instead of Business Class, comparing prices, seeking out rebates and special rates and so on. 'Proven' formulas such as spending 20% less and travelling under less accommodating conditions were only short-term solutions.

Even as companies are saving wherever possible and only approve business trips that are absolutely necessary, they will have to reckon with increasing travel costs in the near future. Deutsche Bahn increased its rates again, and airlines have had to boost prices due to rising oil and fuel prices.

The Solution

Landolfi DER Business Travel/SYNERGI and its service portfolio collectively called 'professional travel management' has shown that there is another way. The focus of this portfolio is the Internet-based reservation portal Global TR@C. DER Business Travel/SYNERGI corporate customers can book all required business travel services such as flights, hotels, car hire and rail tickets themselves online.

At the end of 2003, DER Business Travel/SYNERGI had 500 corporate customers that used Global TR@C. It added another 130 customers in 2004 alone. The comprehensive travel management system can be customised to a company's specific needs. It allows customers to set parameters for selecting preferred airlines, hotel chains and car hire companies and save detailed travel guidelines. The SpeedBook function allows companies to make a reservation in under a minute, thus cutting process-related travel costs.

"Without an introduction to the product and training, a large portion of the range of functions would remain unused", explains Mr Spangenberg. Like their customers, business travel service providers must investigate their costs and take advantage of every chance for optimisation. "Before, an account manager visited the company he or she was responsible for and led training sessions. Costs for flights, rail tickets and hire cars added up fast, easily reaching several hundred Euro", calculates Mr Spangenberg.

A solution was found quickly: using the Internet and online meetings to communicate with corporate clients for presentations, meetings and product training. Market research and an evaluation of possible Web conferencing solutions narrowed the field of options down to three: Centra from Centra Software, Netmeeting from Microsoft and WebEx Meeting Center from WebEx. "The comprehensive features, the positive experience of an employee who had used the solution at his previous job and the impressive price/performance ratio convinced DER Business Travel/SYNERGI to go with WebEx Meeting Center", says Mr Spangenberg.

The new solution was rolled out quickly. A pilot saw ten employees at the Frankfurt headquarters using WebEx Meeting Center. An additional twelve were added shortly thereafter. The next

step was to include fifty other users in the regional DER Business Travel/SYNERGI offices in Germany. "Our customers were impressed by the solution almost immediately as they didn't need any additional software to use WebEx services for training or meetings with our account managers", adds Mr Spangenberg. All users need is a Web browser such as Internet Explorer, Netscape Communicator, Mozilla Firefox or even Safari for Macs. WebEx services can run on any platform and are available around the clock – just like a telephone. Instead of having to set up their own hardware and communications infrastructure, corporate customers and DER Business Travel/SYNERGI use WebEx Media Tone technology.

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The Benefits

"WebEx Meeting Center has proven to be extremely useful from every angle. If you can show that online reservations make the most of business travel expenses, you will gain customers almost automatically. We have been able to make sales processes very efficient and are aiming for high productivity and continuous cost controlling", says Mr Spangenberg. Following its positive experience with WebEx in Germany, DER Business Travel/SYNERGI plans to extend use to its international activities.

According to Mr Spangenberg, the future intent is to use WebEx Meeting Center to communicate, cooperate and coordinate tenders, quotes and other business activities.

HIGHLIGHTS

- DER Business Travel/SYNERGI uses WebEx Meeting Center as a long term solution to reduce travel costs.
- DER Business Travel/SYNERGI uses WebEx Meeting Center to communicate with clients for presentations, meetings and product training of its online reservations system.
- Following its positive experience with Web conferencing in Germany, DER Business Travel/SYNERGI plans to extend use to its international activities.