



The Millennial Shift in Business Travel

Few topics in recent years have captured the business travel industry's collective attention as has the spread of Millennials in the workforce. The habits and desires of today's youngest workers, and their perceptions of structured travel programs and established processes, have transfixed travel managers and suppliers alike as all strategize ways to attract the interest and influence behavior of travelers 35 and younger. A "seismic change" is underway in the workplace, according to Randstad and Future Workplace as in 2016 "3.6 million Baby Boomers are set to retire, one-fourth of Millennial workers will take on management roles and Generation Z (born between 1994 and 2010) start to enter the workforce."

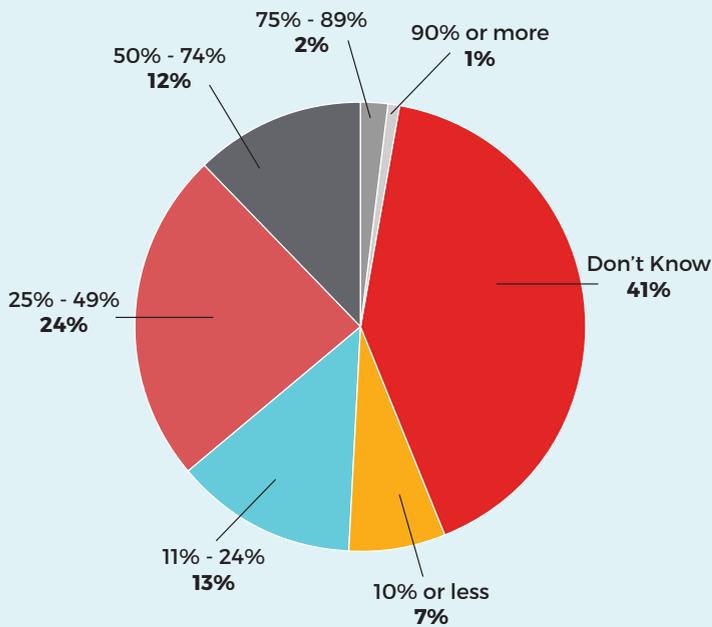
Managing Millennial business travelers needn't be a complex process or one that requires a complete restructuring of a managed travel program. While no single broad brush can capture all the varied motivations of millions of Millennials, there nevertheless are some general tactics that can help improve their travel experience and keep them happily compliant within a travel program while keeping costs under control.

That was the conclusion of a recent BTN Group Content Solutions webinar, sponsored by Direct Travel, concerning shifts in business travel management driven by the Millennial generation, those born between 1982 and 2004. Two travel buyers and a veteran consultant shared their strategies for communications, compliance and policies that resonate with such business travelers.

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“Millennials can be a foundational group that can help to move a program forward,” said GoldSpring Consulting partner Will Tate. “They embrace change and are very pleased to be early adopters.”

PERCENT OF TRAVELER BASE 35 OR YOUNGER?



Source: BTN Group / Direct Travel webinar reg data from 800 business travel professionals, September-October 2017

Millennials’ general willingness to embrace new methods of travel sourcing, booking and payment as well as technology innovations during a trip can help smooth the introduction of new tech into a travel program, Tate said. Enabling them to use such tools within a travel policy will help to keep them compliant, he added, but cautioned that organizations must not be heavy-handed in seeking that compliance.

“The command-and-control approach is not going to work,” Tate said. Instead, he advised, it’s critical to reach out to millennials and understand their needs, allow them a level

of customization that makes sense, and offer options that show program compliance can create value beyond cost savings for the company. One client, he said, required that properties within the corporate programs meet certain social responsibility benchmarks. “Because of this, millennials were very eager to support these preferred properties, so taking something that’s bigger than cost—creating more value—created a real win for everyone inside of the program,” Tate said.

Audio, video and voice technology company Dolby Laboratories in recent years has looked to trends in the consumer travel market as a beacon for changes it has made in its own program, said senior travel manager Carey Ann Pascoe, with the thought that doing so would help make the program more attractive to Millennials.

Dolby has rolled out a new travel management company and strategic meetings management program and is in the process of deploying a global expense management system. The company also has embraced apps for travel booking and expense management and has deployed an internal communications platform for travel-related topics. “Company culture and tone from the top play a role in how this plays out,” in managing travel, said Pascoe. “But millennials are super-fast learners and early adopters ... and they come to you as an open slate.”

Meanwhile, luxury fashion firm Tapestry Inc.—until very recently known as Coach—where about half the business travelers are Millennials, has offered more content through its booking tool, while instituting caps in sec-

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ondary and tertiary cities, according to senior manager of global travel Rosemary Maloney.

The company also worked to temper expectations of VIP travel experience, allowed for alternative travel supplier options within policy and worked to educate Millennials on the importance of staying within the program while allowing them more freedom of choice.

“We can talk about duty of care all we want; it’s the company’s responsibility. But employees are responsible for loyalty to the company,” Maloney said “We do a lot of education [throughout the world] about why it’s important that they book through our tools.”

While neither Tapestry nor Dolby have instituted a so-called open-booking program that allows channel-agnostic booking, due to duty-of-care and time-management concerns, all panelists suggested that allowing in policy “bleisure” options that

blend a leisure travel within business trips is an effective way to keep Millennials engaged and compliant. Tate also suggested offering certain travel technology only to those who book within approved channels.

Regardless, managing Millennial travelers can be challenging but a collaborative approach can be effective, Maloney said.

Given that Millennials by 2020 will comprise more than half of the workforce and account for close to half of all business travel spending, according to the Boston Consulting Group, companies should be studying their own traveler demographics and the best strategies, policies and technologies to ensure that savings and satisfaction goals are met.

Each new generation brings changes, Maloney said. “We need to be mindful that things are going to change and we are going to be able to” adapt to it. ■

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