

The Wire...from AirPlus

Social Media Making Inroads for Managing Travel

AIRPLUS. WHAT TRAVEL PAYMENT IS ALL ABOUT.



Travel management pros see real value in social media tools for increasing travel program agility and enhancing traveler satisfaction.

Whether personal or job-related, corporate travel professionals are participating in more social networks than they did one year ago, and they are doing so at a higher rate, according to a Spring 2010 online survey conducted by AirPlus International. The recent exercise follows up on a year-ago survey also conducted by AirPlus, and included additional social networking platforms where respondents might be active users. Not only did the survey show fairly robust usage numbers for the new inclusions—Plaxo and Triplt—it also showed increased usage on for nearly every social platform making a repeat appearance in the survey this year.

While Linked In users held steady at about 58 percent, use of Facebook increased among surveyed travel management pros by almost 25 percent over last year’s numbers. Use of Twitter, which was employed by 15.5 percent of survey respondents last year, ostensibly doubled its numbers in the 2010 survey. Corporate travel industry blogs were another big performer in year-over-year comparisons, with 20 percent of respondents indicating they participated in this format in 2010 compared to less than 13 percent who did so in 2009, an increase of 50 percent.

In which of the following social media platforms do you participate?

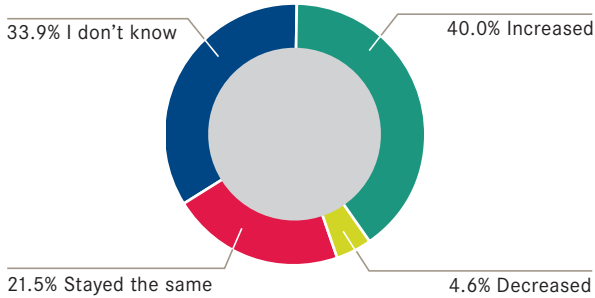
	2009	2010
Linked In	58%	58.5%
Facebook	44.8%	55.4%
Twitter	15.5%	30.8%
Industry Blogs	12.6%	20.0%
MySpace	5.2%	3.1%
Plaxo	na	10.8%
Triplt	na	18.5%
None	28.2%	23.1%
Other	7.5%	4.6%

Overall, a higher percentage of survey respondents cited use of social networking sites this year. Just under 72 percent of respondents indicated they were using social media cites either personally or professionally last year. That number increased to 77 percent in the 2010 survey.

Survey respondents indicated that traveler use of social media sites for travel-related recommendations and/or services has also been on the rise since last year. Forty percent said that their travelers had increased use of social networks for travel-related research, while less than 5 percent thought that it had decreased.

Specialized travel sites that incorporate social networking elements as well as itinerary management tools have developed a devoted following among leisure and business travelers. Triplt, which showed a strong debut in the AirPlus

How has your travelers' use of social media sites for travel recommendations/services changed within the past 12 months?



survey this year, has capitalized on that business traveler interest by offering a free “groups” service that allows a company to create a private network through the site based on the company’s email domain name. The group function allows co-workers with corresponding email domains to exchange itineraries and recommendations away from the eyes of the general Triplt user, sidestepping some of the privacy and confidentiality concerns that continue to give pause to travel management stakeholders when it comes to dealing with the influence of social media sites.

Indeed, the open sharing of company travel itineraries and preferred supplier information on consumer-oriented social media sites has been reported in industry media as a widespread concern for corporate travel managers. Still, there is a growing recognition that being able to share information with colleagues through a social media platform has significant advantages for travel management.

More than 52 percent of survey respondents indicated that traveler satisfaction benefits from the informal exchange of information that a social media platform offers. Nearly 42 percent of respondents said that travel managers could also benefit by listening to feedback about traveler needs. Almost 36 percent cited social media platforms as a way to refine preferred supplier choices based on traveler input.

Outside of the AirPlus survey, leading-edge travel managers have recommended using these platforms as a way to keep travel programs agile and relevant not simply by participating in of-the-moment technologies but using them in innovative ways to push savings opportunities and special benefits to travelers (follow

In what ways do you believe these types of sites can enhance a corporate travel program?

Increase traveler satisfaction through real-time knowledge sharing	52.2%
Encourage and improve traveler camaraderie and morale	19.4%
Help travel managers understand what is most important to travelers/anticipate needs	41.8%
Help travel managers select preferred partners based on information shared by travelers	35.8%
I don't know	14.9%
Social media is not useful for a travel program	20.9%
Other	4.5%

Additional Resources links for more details). As a new generation of business traveler enters the workplace with plugged-in lives and consumer-style expectations for enterprise technologies, managed travel programs would do well to explore the options now.

Additional Resources:

5Q With Travel Manager Michelle De Costa

<http://www.management.travel/news.php?cid=travel-manager-Michelle-De-Costa.May-10.20>

10 Top Travel Management Tactics for 2010 (webinar)

www.promedia.travel/webinars

Reinventing the Water Cooler: Buyers and TMCs Exploring Social Networking

<http://www.procurement.travel/news.php?cid=buyers-TMCs-social-networking-TMC.Mar-10.31>

Is Tech Driving the Traveler-Centric Future? Managers Fear Loss of Control

<http://www.procurement.travel/news.php?cid=tech-traveler-centric-future.Dec-09.01>

Survey Methodology: For this issue of *The Wire*, AirPlus International surveyed 67 travel management professionals in North America and Europe from April 29 to May 10.

AirPlus International, Inc.

225 Reinekers Lane, Suite 500

Alexandria, VA 22314 USA

T +1 (703) 373-0940

F +1 (703) 373-0941

usa@airplus.com

www.airplus.com

www.airpluscommunity.com

www.facebook.com/airplusinternational

www.twitter.com/airplus