

# The Wire...from AirPlus

## June 2011: Social Media Use Jumps in Managed Travel Space



**AIRPLUS.** WHAT TRAVEL PAYMENT IS ALL ABOUT.

### Travel managers see increasing value in social media platforms as a way to enhance a corporate travel program.

For the past several years, industry insiders have been warning corporate travel managers that they ignore social media at their own risk. That warning seems to be resonating as increasing numbers of travel professionals say they see the value of social media sites as a way to enhance a corporate travel program.

According to the results of a spring 2011 survey conducted by AirPlus International, 59 percent of those surveyed believe social media helps travel managers understand what is most important to travelers and anticipate their needs, a significant jump from the 41 percent who said the same in a similar AirPlus survey last year.

However, that knowledge doesn't always translate to concrete action in supplier choices: 42 percent said social media sites help travel managers select partners based on information shared by travelers, leaving a gap of 17 percent between understanding needs and using that information to determine partners.

There were also leaps in perceptions of benefits to travelers: two-thirds of those surveyed (66 percent) believe that social media sites increase traveler satisfaction through real-time knowledge sharing—up

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

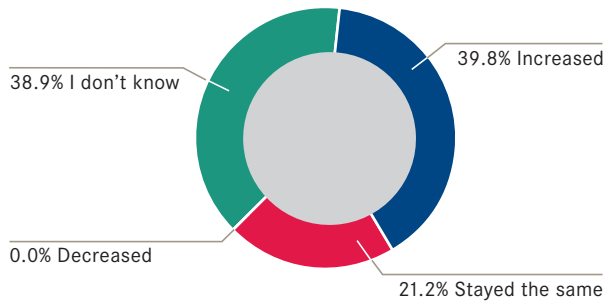
	2009	2010	2011
LinkedIn	58.0%	58.5%	74.3%
Facebook	44.8%	55.4%	61.5%
Twitter	15.5%	30.8%	28.4%
Industry Blogs	12.6%	20.0%	31.2%
MySpace	5.2%	3.1%	0.9%
Plaxo	na	10.8%	10.1%
Triplt	na	18.5%	25.7%
Enterprise Social Tools	na	na	9.2%
None	28.2%	23.1%	16.5%

18 percent from last year. And 40 percent believe such sites encourage and improve traveler camaraderie and morale, more than double the 19 percent who said the same last year.

Given the numerous ways that travel professionals believe such sites can enhance a corporate travel program, it's no surprise that the survey also showed a growth in the numbers of those who participate in social media platforms themselves. Whether for personal use, professional use or a combination of the two, 83 percent of respondents indicated they participate in social media sites this year, compared to 77 percent last year.

While 39 percent of the respondents did not know if their travelers' use of social media sites for travel recommendations and services had changed within the

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



past year, 40 percent say that usage has increased and 21 percent believe it has remained the same. Not one respondent thought usage among travelers had decreased, a mark of how commonplace social media has become.

When asked about specific social media platforms, respondents showed a clear preference for several social media sites, whose usage has increased in the past two years. LinkedIn users, for example, which held virtually steady in 2009 (58 percent) and 2010 (59 percent), jumped to 74 percent this year, while Facebook users grew more modestly, going from a low of 45 percent in 2009 to 55 percent last year to 62 percent this year. The numbers who claimed to use Twitter dropped slightly, from 31 percent last year to 28 percent this year, and MySpace has clearly lost favor, moving from 5 percent in 2009 to less than 1 percent this year.

The only other decrease was in the number of respondents who said they don't participate in any social media platforms—28 percent in 2009 dropped to 23 percent in 2010, which further fell to 17 percent this year.

An increase to 31 percent of respondents who said they participate in industry blogs this year from only 20 percent last year indicates participants are also finding value in conversations with peers.

As a travel-specific platform, Triplt has shown an increase in use, with survey respondents who say they are users growing from 19 percent last year to 26 percent this year.

One potential yet to be explored among most participants is enterprise social tools, such as Yammer and Chatter. Both allow corporations to set up private

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

	2010	2011
Increase traveler satisfaction through real-time knowledge sharing	52.2%	66.1%
Encourage and improve traveler camaraderie and morale	19.4%	40.2%
Help travel managers understand what is most important to travelers/anticipate needs	41.8%	58.9%
Help travel managers select partners based on information shared by travelers	35.8%	42.0%
I don't know	14.9%	13.4%
Social media is not useful for a travel program	20.9%	10.7%

networks for communication and collaboration within the company, as well as further drill down to create networks for smaller groups. Debuting on the survey this year with 9.2 percent of participants saying they participate in such tools, this is likely to be an area of continuing growth for corporate travel management as more options make their way to market.

**Additional Resources:**

**Chewing (And Trimming) The Fat: Buyers Leverage Multifaceted Traveler Communications Programs**  
[http://www.businesstravelnews.com/Business-Travel/Travel-Technology/Articles/Chewing-\(And-Trimming\)-The-Fat-Buyers-Leverage-Multifaceted-Traveler-Communications-Programs/](http://www.businesstravelnews.com/Business-Travel/Travel-Technology/Articles/Chewing-(And-Trimming)-The-Fat-Buyers-Leverage-Multifaceted-Traveler-Communications-Programs/)

**Youthful Workforce Pushing Travel Tech Advancements: Managers Mobilizing Their Travel Strategies**

<http://www.procurement.travel/news.php?cid=youthful-workforce-advance-mobile-travel-technology.Sep-10.30>

**Survey Methodology:** For this issue of *The Wire*, AirPlus International surveyed 146 travel management professionals in North America and Europe from April 26 to May 13, 2011.

**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](mailto:usa@airplus.com)

[www.airplus.com](http://www.airplus.com)

[www.airpluscommunity.com](http://www.airpluscommunity.com)

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