

Travelport, IBM launch AI travel management platform for corporates

Travelport and IBM have launched the IBM Travel Manager, an IA platform, designed to help businesses manage corporate travel spend. According to research done by Travelport, millennial business travellers in South Africa are evolving in corporate travel; demanding both cutting-edge digital support and on-demand advice during their trips.



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Delivered via the IBM Cloud, the platform uses IBM Watson capabilities to intelligently track, manage, predict and analyse travel costs in one place to fundamentally change how companies manage and optimise their travel programmes.

The platform features an interactive and intuitive dashboard that offers end-to-end visibility of travel spending, the ability to create alerts and notifications, predictive and pre-defined spending trend analysis, and natural language understanding to analyse text and uncover insights from structured and unstructured data.

Travelport's research, which surveyed 11,000 travellers in 19 countries who took at least one return flight in the last year, revealed that:

- One third (37%) of South Africa's millennial business travellers now count being unable to access booking information across their devices 24/7 as one of their biggest gripes.
- Two fifths (39%) say they get frustrated when companies don't use data analytics to provide highly personalised travel recommendations based on their past preferences.
- Two fifths (39%) say not being able to get expert advice from human consultants during the booking process is a major pain point.

With annual global business travel spend estimated to reach a record \$1.2tn in 2018, as projected by the Global Business Travel Association, corporate travel managers continue to look for new ways to reduce costs. Currently for businesses to get a full picture of travel patterns a travel manager might have to sift through data silos from travel agencies, cards, expense systems and suppliers for end-to-end visibility of spend and compliance across all travel subcategories but this is

usually undertaken in a historical view rather than in real time.

Optimising travel programmes

The platform features advanced artificial intelligence and provides cognitive computing, predictive data analytics using "what-if" type scenarios, and integrated travel and expense data to help travel management teams, procurement category managers, business units, finance and human resource departments optimise their travel programme, control spend and enhance the end-traveller experience.

IBM Travel Manager gives users complete, unified access to previously siloed information, which, when combined with travel data from the Travelport global distribution system (GDS), is then used to create real-time predictive analytics recommending how adjustments in travel booking behaviour patterns can positively impact a company's travel budget. "IBM Travel Manager, with Travelport's data, combines and normalises data from all key sources, allowing for more robust insights and benchmarking than other reporting solutions," said Fiona Shanley, Travelport's chief customer and marketing officer.

"IBM and Travelport are using the power of AI to unlock previously unavailable insights from multiple internal and external data sources. Travel managers can use this information to proactively drive improved supplier negotiations via real-time and holistic data, enable budget holders to understand and change spending patterns, and improve travel policy compliance monitoring," said Elizabeth Pollock, IBM Industry client leader for travel and transportation.

The product is expected to be commercially available to customers through both IBM and Travelport.

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