



Using data to drive your global travel program



Introduction

In the last two decades, data has been pushed to the forefront of every level of business. Business travel is no exception. The relationship between data analytics and global corporate travel programs and policies has long been in play. Data helps steer business decisions every step of the way. The advent of

artificial intelligence (AI), predictive analytics, machine learning (ML), data visualization, and robust, up-to-date reports are fueling important innovations in every type of business. It's of equal importance to anyone working in business travel, from procurement managers and CFOs to travel managers.

While AI, ML, and predictive analytics are current buzzwords, data has always driven business decisions — albeit from the backseat. But as different functions embrace the value of data — all the way up to the C-suite — it's become a necessity to understand what's behind the screen. Increasing traveler satisfaction and automating workflows is as important as refining strategies and policies to save money.

Understanding how to best use the data that's available to you can help you boost traveler satisfaction. It can also inform your understanding of travel expenses and help you find savings. You can then create reports that show procurement the value of a well-managed and data-driven travel program.

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How data can create a great travel experience

Data helps to create products that benefit customers, like easy-to-use apps that help travel managers boost traveler satisfaction and increase adoption.

“At Egencia we’re able to leverage the consumer behavior patterns from the larger Expedia Group of websites,”

Michael Gulmann, chief product officer, said.

“By using the data from more than 189 billion rows of consumer behavior data, we’re able to come up with theories on how to make the online experience better for our customers.”

The power of billions and billions of bytes of data allows Egencia to create a user-friendly interface that is intimately familiar to travelers.

“The key to having a successful travel program is to ensure that you’re delivering an excellent, intuitive customer experience,” Gulmann said.

“Asking employees of today’s workforce to use corporate solutions that aren’t user-friendly and have been built on antiquated technology just doesn’t work.

We’ve found that by creating a familiar, consumer-like experience, online adoption happens naturally, and compliance follows.”

By measuring the data available and pinpointing commonalities in usage behavior, the most common denominators can be defined. This information is used to build an intuitive experience for travelers. The ease-of-use increases adoption of the app, which boosts compliance and saves time — for travelers and travel managers.

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Using AI and ML to personalize business travel

At Egencia, we've been **writing about AI** for a while. But AI isn't a singular technology. It's a collection of technologies and approaches aimed at finding patterns in mountains of data. Once the patterns are identified, business processes can be automated.

As part of the Expedia Group, Egencia is a portion of an entire mountain range of travel data. The AI approach we apply to this data is ML. Essentially, we use ML techniques to identify patterns in training data sets that can be used to achieve specific outcomes like predicting a traveler's preferred hotel or whether the price of a flight will go up or down.

The ability to find additional patterns in data that aren't easily obvious to humans, who can't process big sets of data quickly, helps to make the entire travel management system more predictive and action-oriented.

A big asset of AI in business travel is that it largely happens without users needing to do anything other than enjoy a better experience.



Take for instance mobility. A smartphone offers travelers a host of travel options they can easily carry with them wherever they go. Flight connections, hotel choices — travelers can access it all with just a few taps. The downside is that it's a small screen. It can only display so many choices without scrolling. Scrolling might not be an issue if you're reading an article or using social media, but when travelers are scrambling to solve a customer emergency while they're on the road, they need to be able to make quick travel decisions so they can get back to business.

Anything that helps us prioritize travelers' preferred choices makes it easier for them to take action. It also makes it more likely they'll stay compliant with corporate travel policy rather than resorting to using one of the consumer travel apps they can access on their phone.

That's the power of AI — we can give your travelers what they want as a first choice.

And AI is driven by data. The more data that's available, the better the insights. Egencia builds its own technology across every aspect of the travel business. Many of our competitors put a nice visual wrapper on their service, but they're actually interfacing with other companies behind the scenes.

If you work with other TMCs, they might not actually have access to all the data necessary to perform this rich ML analysis.

Remember, the AI that is trained is only as good as the data that it learned from. If that data is incomplete, the patterns AI looks for are incomplete. As AI expands on those patterns, you could be automating yourself in the wrong direction. Owning all the technology alleviates those worries.

At Egencia, we know where the data's coming from. Some might come from us, some from Expedia Group, and some from your travelers' history of using our platform. We don't have to guess at what someone else is doing with their data. There's no black box that needs to be trusted and you have the ability to know why something was specifically created for your business travel program.

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Data drives the user experience far beyond booking

Data-driven product features like “**last mile**” in the Egencia app integrates with Uber and Citymapper. Launched in 2016 as a solution to help business travelers avoid frustration booking ground transportation, the app features personalized transport options. Uber, public transit, and walking – are surfaced to the traveler wherever they are. To help travel managers get visibility into this traveler service, companies have the option to set Uber in or out of policy. They also can consolidate the booking data into their reporting.

The feature was an undeniable success, with more than 500,000 business travelers using it within five months. The app is available on desktop, mobile, and smartwatch, letting travelers access the app when and how they want.

Safety is a big concern for travel managers and in the event of an emergency, locating travelers is of the utmost importance. With one click or tap, Traveler Tracker lets you know exactly where any of your travelers are, at any time.

Outside of the app, proprietary data-driven technology helps improve travel program performance. The Egencia Travel Intelligence home page gives an overview of a travel program and shows key metrics and interactive graphs on travel

spend, online adoption, supplier performance and program compliance, and features drill-down capabilities for up-to-date transactional data.

The Travel Intelligence home page also provides customers comprehensive views of specific program metrics, with detailed data, charts, and key insights, and offers travel program managers recommended actions to improve performance.



Using data for a customer-centric experience

It's no secret that Amazon's business model is customer-centric—first and foremost. The online retailer understands the importance of building customer loyalty by offering a seamless, efficient, and reliable shopping experience.

It's no different with Egencia. Our **customer-centric approach** relies on data (like Amazon) to give business travelers the same easy and engaging experience with our booking platform.

To do this we offer:

- Speed: More and more travelers like to book their own travel, so we've built a quick and easy booking process.
- Content options: We use data to build business travelers' journey profiles, track their selections, and surface their favorite travel options.
- Customer experience: Like suppliers, corporate buyers can use technology to generate data that can suggest ways to improve travelers' experiences. After all, happy (compliant) travelers are the goal.

Beyond using data to set individual preferences, collected and targeted data can be used to manage the bottom line.

For example, reminders can be set to encourage cost-savings with advance booking.

Traveler data can be used to negotiate supplier rates. If you're a global organization that's constantly making last-minute hotel room bookings, last room availability (LRA) rates make sense. But if most of your travelers drive or take a train when traveling, negotiating parking rates or hotels near transit hubs would be better-suited to your travel program.

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Quality of data versus quantity

Certainly, having vast amounts of data at your disposal is invaluable when it comes to AI, ML, and predictive analytics. All of these things rely on sets of big data to extrapolate and determine what may best serve a traveler. And in the case of **predictive analytics**, flag a travel arranger as to the most cost-saving time to book annual trips. However, the quality of data you use is vastly more important than the quantity.

Big data has the ability to revolutionize corporate travel. One way we're doing this is by offering a **travel payment solution** that connects and centralizes data. This allows those who are managing travel the opportunity to predict the amount they can save by streamlining the entire process or working with preferred vendors.

Starbucks makes great use of data to manage the costs of its global travel program. With an annual global air spend of \$16 million and the purchase power of more than 23,000 flights a year, keeping a close eye on travel expenses is essential.

Using Egencia's on-demand reporting to create monthly management reports that show how each business unit is performing,

the Starbucks travel team is able to pull metrics on average ticket price and nightly rates and compare its international and domestic travel spends. Having this data at their disposal allows the travel team to identify cost spikes in each business unit. Comparing costs across teams globally keeps track of current spend and lets the travel team build yearly plans for each country based on unique travel needs.

Building and reading data-rich reports doesn't have to be difficult, either. With the **Egencia Analytics Studio** you don't need to be a data scientist to pull reports that provide insights into spend, compliance, or type of travel.

The Analytics Studio uses data visualization to simplify thousands of rows of data into easy-to-understand charts and graphs. This eliminates the need for advanced analysis and allows travel managers and business decision makers to stay on top of their global business travel program.

Until now, the data visualization tools that were available were expensive, hard to use, or both. But companies looking for a clear understanding of their corporate travel program no longer face these limitations.

With the Analytics Studio, you can explore data visually, discover hidden insights, and identify new sources of savings. You can also track trends over time to help you optimize spend across travel categories like air, hotel, train, and car.

Going beyond a standard business dashboard, the rich, up-to-date data visualization that's at your fingertips allows you to quickly communicate important travel data and results with internal teams and executives.

Conclusion

Data as a driver in corporate decision-making is here to stay. With the right tools in place, you can harness the power of data to your advantage. By using data to closely monitor spend, find cost savings, or centralize some of your travel program's processes you can make a big impact.

At Egencia we're constantly innovating to keep up with the evolution in tech and data. And as data fuels growth in AI, ML, and predictive analytics, you can take a hands-off approach with a TMC that owns its data. Let your TMC do the legwork and deliver features and products that contribute to traveler satisfaction, duty of care, and compliance.

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