



AGENCY MAKES VIDEOCONFERENCING PART OF THE PROGRAM

by Harvey Chipkin

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Although videoconferencing is often perceived as a substitute for travel that cuts travel consultants out of the loop, one agency has decided to make it part of its travel management program.

Milwaukee-based Adelman Travel Group sees this strategy as a way to control spend by clients and to ensure that the agency remains involved no matter what options its corporate travelers choose.



Steven Cline

Travel Market Report spoke with Steven Cline, COO, about why Adelman has taken this approach to videoconferencing and how it works.

Isn't videoconferencing a threat to travel?

Cline: We are not advocates of eliminating travel. However, we see videoconferencing as related to travel. Our objective is to bring people together to conduct business in the most efficient way possible. The closest parallel is online booking tools. When they emerged they were perceived as a threat, but it depends on how you approach any of these tools.

And we don't believe that videoconferencing necessarily reduces travel in the long run. It actually expedites some travel. For example, you might be doing interviews with potential employees. If you can videoconference with more interviewees then you might bring additional candidates to meet in person. In some instances, videoconferencing might create more urgency to bring parties together to do business.

How do you get involved in the videoconferencing process?

Cline: If our customers have invested in videoconferencing equipment we will help with the adoption of that technology. Corporations are looking not just for savings but for cost avoidance solutions. They are asking: Do I even need to take this trip? That's usually not good news for travel management companies, but think back to the 1970s and 1980s when travel agencies started to separate business travel from leisure travel so they would be included in the business travel arena. That was a solution and we see this as another solution. If somebody declines the videoconferencing option when we recommend it, we will track that. We'll find out the reason and add it to our database. We'll build in quality control checks around their travel policies.

How does it work in practical terms?

Cline: We are in the process of integrating this into our online booking solutions. We can build it into travel policy software and continue to manage that activity just as we do travel. We code it just the same as we would an airline ticket.

Where are you going with this?

Cline: We have trademarked the name VideoTravel as another business solution. We see it as similar to being in Europe and it being more efficient to take a train rather than a plane. Except you're videoconferencing instead of taking a plane.

How have clients reacted to this?

Cline: There has been some challenge in selling and marketing it. Travel and videoconferencing tend to live in two different departments within corporations. You have to get the respective corporate departments to take a look at this, so it's an educational process. We do see this as something that's going to happen because the video technology just keeps getting better.

When might videoconferencing be appropriate?

Cline: If one employee is meeting another employee for a small meeting, videoconferencing may be best. That was the kind of business that was going away for us and we wanted to get involved. The key word here is 'manage.' We will help our customers change the behavior of travelers. Say someone is planning to travel from Seattle to Chicago – and the company has videoconferencing capability in both cities – we can schedule the meeting and report back to them as far as cost avoidance. But it's not cookie cutter. Videoconferencing might work on some occasions for green-focused companies, but not for others. And there might, in fact, be times when videoconferencing is appropriate for a face-to-face customer meeting.