



TRAVEL *INTUITION* A SEAMLESS PROCESS





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Is academic travel still a long way from being an efficient and seamless process? In this article Campus Travel explains why it matters and what help is in sight.

HOW CLOSE TO 'SEAMLESS' IS THE ACADEMIC TRAVEL PROCESS?

We often hear travel providers wanting to make the travel experience as user-friendly and seamless as possible for their academic travellers – be they VIP travellers, experienced academics or first-year research students. However, the definition of seamless is “happening without any sudden changes, interruption, or difficulty.”

Apply that to academic travel and you realise the industry is still a long way off. When an airline suffers a technology outage or is grounded because of inclement weather, seamless is left in the clouds. The airline is blasted on mainstream and social media and the brand takes a hit.

Stranded academic travellers join lengthy queues for rebooking and paper-based accommodation vouchers. Information on the itinerary changes eventually filter back to beleaguered travel providers or internal travel bookers.

There is no knowing the true cost to the academic community in terms of the loss of time and productivity and not having travellers where they need to be. However, a report published by Amadeus last October put the annual cost to the airline industry at \$60 billion. And, cost is not the only driver for developing a more seamless experience.

Rising passenger numbers in general will put pressure on suppliers and intermediaries alike to make things more efficient. No wonder then that there is much discussion about seamless travel – end-to-end, door-to-door, through airports ... the buzzwords continue.

But what is actually happening?

Campus Travel's Sam was made available to Australian customers earlier this year to enable academic travellers to have a more seamless experience. It combines the automation of chatbots and artificial intelligence with the expertise of its consultants to deliver personalised information to travellers via their mobile devices.

SAM – Smart Assistant for Mobile, assists academic travellers pre, during and post trip with everything from itinerary management, air and hotel bookings, flight updates, local city and country information, weather and restaurant suggestions to security notifications, ground transportation, driving directions, immigration advice and vaccination status. SAM can make use of accumulated information such as travel patterns and preferences and update travellers accordingly.

For example, when a traveller lands at the airport, SAM will message the carousel number for collecting baggage and ask if the user needs to arrange transport from the airport to their hotel. The more a traveller uses SAM, the more intelligent the chatbot becomes, so that information delivered to the user is even more personalised. Other industry partnerships are also being formed and technology being integrated to provide travellers with access to the content they want and the tools that make travel management easier.

A good example is Lyft's recent announcement that it can automatically email receipts to expense management systems including Certify, Chrome River and Concur. Automatically feeding



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MILLENNIALS ARE THE LEAST LIKELY TO USE ONLINE BOOKING TOOLS ACCORDING TO GBTA RESEARCH

the expenses data into a customer's system makes life easier for travellers, by eliminating the need for a manual expense reporting process.

These technologies are joining the dots to create a seamless experience

There are also plans to enable airlines and hotels to use predictive analysis to be more proactive in terms of procuring the right room for the right passenger.

Again, that might seem like a small thing, but in these days of traveller centricity, Campus Travel believes the ability for travellers to be recognised and taken care of is a big plus. It also ticks boxes for academic travel providers working to meet duty of care obligations as well as the potential for increased efficiency through automation. The potential cost and productivity savings which developments such as these can deliver has meant a veritable rush of suppliers wanting to develop this area.

Amadeus recently unveiled a service that integrates with Salesforce to provide information on the need and value of a business or study trip. Return on investment is a measure that travel managers have long sought.

Most of these developments would not exist without mobile, demonstrating that it is mobile that will go furthest in joining the dots to a more seamless travel experience for academic travellers. Consumers now turn to mobile devices for so much in their daily lives and the academic and educational travel community is no different.

Here's another interesting thought. Millennials are the least likely to use

online booking tools according to GBTA research released earlier this year. That might not be surprising, the segment is far more used to living their lives on mobile and consumer-grade technology which is easier to use and more user-friendly.

But what might make travel provider sit up straight is that according to the same research, frequent travellers are almost as likely to reject booking tools. The study, which surveyed travellers from Germany, the UK and France, shows they too are embracing mobile, so-called sharing economy services and booking direct. All these factors will continue to drive technology companies and suppliers to improve the process for Campus Travel customers from booking, through to the trip and post-trip.

All these developments, whether from established players or startups looking to disrupt, have to be good. There are gains to be made in terms of cost and savings, increased efficiency and duty of care implications for travel managers. And, happier travellers are generally more productive and draw greater benefits from their travel experience.

It is the idea that change and innovation are good. There is recognition from very large companies, both within and outside the travel industry, that there are different ways of doing things and sometimes the answer might come from outside.

At an ACTE/CAPA event in Amsterdam last year, PwC Strategy & partner Stefan Stroh summed it up nicely. He said that if the industry doesn't work things out then someone will come in from the outside "with a better user experience that forces others to play with them."

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