

Traveller centricity v traveller safety

A recent GBTA survey unveils some new management challenges for corporates

Attending a concert in Manchester or going to Borough Market for a drink on a Saturday night are both pretty ordinary activities. But it was what happened next when people were doing just that this past summer in the UK which highlights how risky going about everyday life can be.

It's an example of how challenges are increasing, not decreasing, for those responsible for looking after corporate travellers. And it's not only because of dramatic incidents. Remember you're more than 100 times more likely to have a fatal car accident than be killed in a plane crash.

When employees are working – whether it be sitting at an office desk or travelling for a meeting – their employer is responsible for their safety. And that means minimising risk and being able to provide support when they're away from home.

A recent research report from the GBTA (the Global Business Travel Association) has identified some new risk management challenges for travel managers. And the driving factor is the growth of traveller centricity.

Changes in traveller booking behaviour are causing gaps to emerge in travel managers' duty of care programmes.

INTEGRATING DATA

Two booking trends, namely the increasing tendency for the traveller to be in fact the booker and the increase in the use of different booking channels, whether they be sharing economy sites, OTAs or, indeed, suppliers' own sites, available to travellers, may be inadvertently introducing duty of care challenges.

The GBTA's *How to close risk management loopholes* contends that when travellers use their travel management company or a corporate self-booking tool, there is no risk issue emanating from a lack of information because all the data has been collected.

Pip English, FCM's Global Risk Product Leader, agrees that travellers using different booking channels can be problematic. "Having your data through one TMC is the best way forward because it reduces all the risk points to one. Even if you have a data consolidator, they've got to get data from multiple sources."

Data integration tools or consolidation does not seem to be a popular solution. According to the GBTA report, "Only one in five travel managers report using technology to capture traveller data booked outside their travel programme."

In fact the report's author found that 31% of travel managers simply said, "We are unable to support travellers who book outside our programmes."

English believes there are ways other than booking data, such as location sharing, which enable managers to track travellers. FCM's mobile app, for example, allows travellers to share their location. The practice may, however, lead to other issues. For example, a corporate instructing its travellers to have their GPS on at all times could be legally problematic in some countries.

Nonetheless, the GBTA report, based on 148 travel manager responses to an April survey, found that not knowing the location of a large number of travellers meant the majority - 3 in 5 - of travel managers relied on travellers to contact someone in the company if they needed assistance while travelling.

REACTIVE OR PROACTIVE?

Despite duty of care now being a legal obligation rather than mere good practice, many companies don't have proactive policies but merely respond once contacted.

It's not a policy that FCM's English would endorse. He says, "There needs to be a joined up approach. The more centralised the response process is, the more efficient it will be. Let your travellers know how to communicate with the organisation, not just one name because they could be away or at a meeting but a central point of contact like one number that goes to a team or if one person is absent that someone else will answer."

Another piece of GBTA research shows the unintended consequences when the corporate culture expects travellers to communicate with the company rather than vice versa. The chart "Who do they call first?" shows that when travellers contact work in the event of an emergency they are more likely to communicate with their line manager than the travel department.

The GBTA believes "This is a dangerous strategy given that more than half of travellers say they would call their supervisor if they were in need of support - not the travel manager or security department."

Who do they call first?



Source: GBTA, *Risk on the Road*

Note: Chart based on 798 responses to the question "Who would you call if you were in need of support/assistance due to an emergency or safety and security situation when on business travel? Please select all that apply."

This is also not what FCM considers best practice. "I wouldn't consider my business line manager the person I'd go to if I were in trouble on the road. The best travel risk management will have one number, often to your TMC or security company," says English.

THE DANGERS OF A FRAGMENTED RISK MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The GBTA research also points out some possible unintended consequences of travellers making their own bookings. Travel managers often concentrate on ensuring that travellers make use of preferred suppliers, book the appropriate class of travel and respect rate ceilings. All those criteria can be met by independent booking; duty of care obligations might not be.

Having access to an out-of-hours service can be costly and not every organisation will be willing to fund it. "We need to recognise that there can be an inherent conflict between the need to get savings and the need to ensure the safety and security of one's

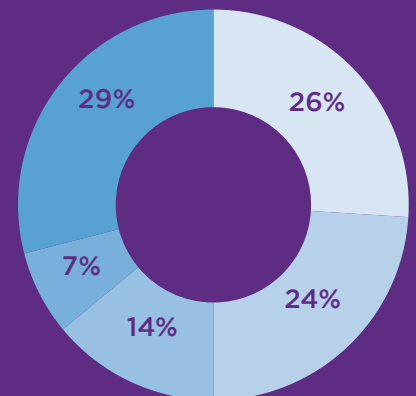
travellers," says English.

Half of all travel managers who responded to the survey can account for all their employees within two hours.

Two hours may seem an eternity if you're a loved one clinging to a phone in anticipation of news. But it is acceptable.

But is being in the other 50% of this chart really where you want to be? 📱

Average time elapsing between security incident and confirmation of every employee's safety



Source: GBTA, *How to Close Risk Management Loopholes*

Legend: Less than 1 hour, 1-2 hours, 3-5 hours, 6 or more hours, Don't know