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Notebook: Content Quest Leads ITW's Sharpe To New Tooling

By Jay Campbell • August 25, 2026

Chicago — Travel pros at Illinois Tool Works have been vocal about content gaps and booking channel leakage for over 20 years. Its current travel leader, Cathy Sharpe, employed what she called a stopgap starting more than a decade ago. The company's latest project brings in Cruising Altitude, the direct distribution startup from another industry veteran, Carmine Carpanzano, whose efforts to this end have also been nothing if not dogged.

While she has plenty of other priorities, addressing booking-visibility "blind spots" remains atop the to-do list for Sharpe, ITW's director of strategic sourcing for global travel and expense management services. A June 2026 [article](#) in Business Travel Executive noted that ITW was one of 10 firms testing [Cruising Altitude's Altimeter](#) software, which enables managed corporate bookings on supplier websites and pulls back data for corporate clients.

Sharpe's concern is that a booking made directly, for example through Hilton, does not feed ITW's spend data and risk tracking.

"We see that more and more," Sharpe told attendees to one of her panel discussions here at this month's Global Business Travel Association convention. "We're not able to

fulfill our agreements with our suppliers. We have that spend, but it's off-grid. Very difficult."

A global manufacturing company in more than 50 markets, ITW has about 20,000 travelers worldwide, she said. Business units run autonomously to deliver on a promise of "local presence." Along with cultural differences across the globe and resistance to using a policy "stick," this makes it challenging to globalize travel to obtain leverage for contracts. The company spends about \$100 million on travel, said Sharpe.

"We've had to wrap our heads around how [to do] things differently," Sharpe said. "How do we make sure that our discounts are out there and extended to all of our people? How do we make sure that they are having the most efficiency when they're booking? Access to great technology. Duty of care. And we need to be able to tell a great story to our stakeholders when it comes to the value of our program."

"We have accepted that there is fragmentation now. We have to figure out how to bring everything together. There are some amazing technologies out there that are coming, some that are already here, that can help you to gather. We are gatherers, and we

need to make sure that our travelers are aware of all the things that we do to keep them safe and make their jobs easier, because none of them travel for a living. They all travel to do something that brings value back to the company.”

ITW was one of the first corporates to embrace Concur’s integrated travel and expense offering. It was an early adopter of Concur’s TripLink solution that pulls booking data via email or supplier website connections into Concur. It explored integration between another off-channel data aggregator, Traxo, and Tripbam.

“We’re big TripLink users,” Sharpe said during an October 2025 [BTE Town Hall](#) broadcast. “Fifty percent of our spend this year went off-channel because, if you’re going to GDS content for a BA flight and you go to the BA website, you’re going to find from the U.K. to Chicago, which is a big market for us, the fare differentials are between 2,000 pounds (\$2,688) and 3,000 pounds (\$4,032) for a business class seat. Then BA pulled out of TripLink and we’ve had to find workarounds for that to ensure that we are able to track that traveler for safety and security purposes, for unused ticket purposes, for all of these different things. So it’s been a lot of extra work for us.”

(BA “temporarily decommissioned the integration with Concur TripLink in 2023,” a

Concur press official confirmed in October. “We anticipate the Concur TripLink integration will be reinstated at a future date.” BA is not currently listed on Concur’s TripLink supplier page.)

Given what Sharpe calls an “overwhelming” content challenge, long-held norms need to be reconsidered. “We have to accept that it’s not a neat little package with a bow on it anymore,” said Sharpe. “There are new technology platforms ... that connect to suppliers differently and are able to get this greater content. Whatever TMC you’re using, you should be asking them.”

Sharpe has been a proponent of organizations consolidating with a single global travel management company since long before ITW started trying the off-channel capture solutions. It uses Amex GBT. At GBTA, she described herself as formerly “steadfast” about consolidating to a single TMC globally, despite the challenges it comes with. Now, there are new players and configurations to consider, according to Sharpe.

Cruising Altitude supports corporate policy, negotiated rates, corporate payment, duty of care and expense linkage with supplier websites via the Altimeter product. Carpanzano created it last year after leaving [ARC-owned Traverse Technologies](#) in 2022. Traverse was originally NuTravel, which Carpanzano founded in 2002. Its standalone booking tool was acquired by Certify (now Emburse) in 2017.

