

Cruising Altitude Closes the Travel Booking Gap

Buyer-led by design, this new technology brings supplier-direct bookings under managed travel's watchful eye

Business travelers are smart, and they like the shopping and booking experience they find on suppliers' websites and mobile apps. That's why between 20 and 40 percent of managed travel leaks to supplier direct channels, where business travelers look like consumers.

Travelers book supplier direct for good reasons: They find fares and content not offered through indirect channels, they get loyalty recognition, and the ability to add seats, bags and upgrades in one transaction. But when they leave the managed program, their company's travel buyer loses control. The company loses visibility, discounts, duty of care and data, and the supplier loses its direct relationship with the corporate customer.

The problem isn't traveler compliance. The problem is supplier-direct is a channel that corporate programs haven't been able to manage.

Until now.

Cruising Altitude has a different answer: Stop fighting direct and start governing it.

"I haven't met a corporate travel leader who proclaims they capture 100 percent of their spend," says Cathy Sharpe, director of strategic sourcing, global travel and expense management services at global manufacturing giant ITW, and a member of Cruising Altitude's Buyer Advisory Board.

"But managing travel is about far more than just tracking dollars," Sharpe says. "It's about ensuring traveler safety, spotting trends, and understanding what our people consume, how they choose to consume it, and how we can support them. Cruising Altitude is built differently: It is technology designed by buyers, for buyers."

Cruising Altitude is a complete solution that finally brings the supplier direct channel into the corporate managed travel program. Cruising Altitude is not a standalone online booking tool or restructured tech stack that adds another silo. Instead, it connects the one channel the current stack was never built to reach.

"Think of Cruising Altitude as sitting between and connecting the traveler and their company to the supplier's website and mobile apps," says Greeley Koch, managing director at 490 Consulting, and a strategic advisor to Cruising Altitude. When a traveler initiates a business trip booking on a supplier website and logs in with their loyalty account and company-related e-mail, the supplier recognizes the traveler, their loyalty status and their associated company, Koch explains. Cruising Altitude confirms the traveler's employment status and sends the supplier the company's travel policy, method of payment and negotiated discount codes. In turn, the supplier sends the booking confirmation directly to the traveler and Cruising Altitude retains a record of the booking, while also sharing the information with the duty of care and expense providers associated with the company.

"Cruising Altitude isn't building new pipes, connections or the content," Koch says. "It's using the websites and mobile apps as a facilitator to help recognize the traveler, authenticate them, provide them the proper information, and then ensure the company receives the data back."

TMCs, online booking tools and the GDS were designed for indirect distribution, and they do that job well. But the supplier-direct channel has always sat outside that pipeline. Cruising Altitude fills that gap with a unique three-tiered product stack:

- Cruising Altitude's Altimeter connects the enterprise directly to airlines, hotels and rental car companies and brings the managed program into the supplier's own channel. The company's existing travel policy, written in its own words, drops into Altimeter, where Cruising Altitude's natural language engine translates it into rules applied at the point of shopping across every connected supplier.

Corporate discounts, loyalty recognition, corporate payment processes and HR feeds all follow the traveler's profile. Servicing stays the same with travelers managing changes directly with the supplier.

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- Cruising Altitude's Transponder captures off-channel itineraries from confirmation e-mails, so bookings made anywhere still come back into the program.
- Cruising Altitude's WayPoint is the trip management service in real-time, not after the fact. It combines every booking, made through Altimeter or captured by Transponder, into a single itinerary that follows the traveler and stays current after booking. Every change, cancellation or addition triggers a real time notification to the company's duty of care and expense partners. Plus, supplier direct bookings finally count toward the program.

The result is one complete view of every trip, no matter where it was booked, feeding the tools the company already relies on. The TMC, the booking tool, the duty of care provider and the expense platform all stay in place and Cruising Altitude sits side by side.

Supplier direct through Altimeter is also a more economical model for travel suppliers. Pricing is simple and predictable, with a one-time implementation fee and a capped annual subscription that brings distribution costs down to pennies per booking, enabling suppliers to capture more of the value and pass those savings on to corporate customers through deeper discounts and richer content. And because the subscription is capped and doesn't grow with volume, the more bookings a supplier runs through the channel, the lower its cost per booking becomes.

"Every partner has an important place in our travel ecosystem and we need all of them to maximize our program," Sharpe says. "From my perspective, Cruising Altitude is an addition to our program – not a replacement. It allows us to capture and manage unmanaged spend, data, and activity that we currently lose to leakage."

Cruising Altitude is built for the large enterprise, designed for complex global programs, with suppliers connected region-by-region wherever these companies actually send their travelers.

"That's what it's all about with the business traveler: Keep me moving," Koch says. "And that's why travel managers are saying, 'Now we have a way through Cruising Altitude to keep them on the go, get our discounts, get the duty of care, get the data, get the policy.'"

The result is a stack that finally works as one program. Every channel is governed, every trip is visible, and every existing investment keeps doing its job.

- Travel managers get control of the supplier direct channel without having to police it. They also get the data they've been missing.
- The TMC relationship stays intact. The TMC continues to handle indirect bookings, and Cruising Altitude works alongside it, not against it.
- And finally, travelers get to choose their preferred channel, without stepping outside policy, and the program follows the traveler covering every way its travelers book.

"Travel managers are saying Cruising Altitude is another tool in their toolkit," Koch says. "It doesn't mean that every traveler is going to go direct. But it just means that those who do, we have a way to help them. Now we have a way to really authenticate and validate somebody going direct. Cruising Altitude brings them into our program." ■



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