

How Cisco IT Automated Employee Travel and Event Management

Cisco Unified Contact Center enables Cisco to control costs and provide better service for employee events and travel worldwide.

Cisco IT Case Study / IP Contact Center / Travel and Event Management: This case study describes how Cisco Systems® and its global travel agency use Cisco® contact center technology and tailored call routing applications, developed by Cisco IT, to deliver efficient, quality travel services for employees. This implementation takes advantage of the robust routing and security capabilities of the Cisco network, a leading-edge enterprise environment that is one of the largest and most complex in the world. Cisco customers can draw on Cisco IT's real-world experience in this area to help support similar enterprise needs.

“Without Cisco technology, I could not deliver the results and control we currently enjoy in handling travel arrangements.”

– Caroline Strachan, global project manager, Cisco Corporate Travel Operations

CHALLENGE

How can you bring 12,500 sales personnel to the same place at the same time? For Cisco Systems, the company's global sales meeting presents tremendous logistical challenges—in particular, the individual and often complex travel arrangements for each employee attending this annual event.



Supporting event-related travel is just one of the challenges facing the Cisco Corporate Travel Operations Team. This internal group serves more than 60,000 Cisco employees and temporary workers in 259 cities and 83 countries who travel worldwide for all types of business activity. In order to serve these travelers efficiently, Cisco has outsourced most activity for travel arrangements to American Express.

Initially, travel bookings were handled by local American Express offices in each country. This approach had several drawbacks, including:

- The inability to continually control travel costs and manage risk—It was difficult for so many local offices to meet Cisco standards for employee travel and to deliver consistent service. In addition, for a large event like the global sales meeting, Cisco paid for separate toll-free telephone numbers for registration in each region. These lines were expensive in themselves, but salespeople often called from their cellular phones, adding another cost.
- Streamlining travel operations—Neither Cisco nor American Express could take advantage of the cost reductions and efficiencies that would be gained by centralizing travel operations in a small number of call centers dedicated to Cisco. In previous years, travel arrangements were made using a mix of resources, with an online tool for Cisco travelers in the United States and, elsewhere in the world, a manual process that involved a call to a travel center. Complying with corporate procedures as well as local travel regulations and customs was complex. Consolidating travel service platforms would not be feasible unless the travel

counselors had common systems and processes for serving employees who travel globally.

- Delivering high-quality, 24-hour service to employees—Travelers who needed assistance outside of standard business hours were directed to call a separate travel center. This extended service carried a high cost for the company and was sometimes confusing and frustrating for the traveler.

SOLUTION

To better support the needs of event managers, the travel centers, and traveling employees, Cisco Corporate Travel Operations today makes extensive use of the Cisco network, Cisco products and technologies for contact centers, and tailored applications created by Cisco IT.

A key Cisco strategy has been to consolidate travel services by re-routing telephone calls to local American Express travel offices. Instead, those calls are routed over the Cisco WAN to Cisco travel contact centers in Australia, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Under this arrangement, Cisco provides office space and network connectivity in corporate travel centers, while American Express provides trained travel counselors and the necessary travel infrastructure. Cisco also works with an event management company to manage employee registrations, assist with visa applications, and handle hotel allocations for large events such as the global sales meeting.

This program of contact center consolidation was made in conjunction with deployment of the Cisco Travel Network, an online travel booking tool that helps employees make or change their own travel reservations (Figure 1). The Cisco Travel Network is available around the clock—a critical feature for a global company where employees worldwide need to be able to make instant reservations and last-minute changes.

Figure 1. The Web-Based Cisco Travel Network Allows Employees to Make Their Own Travel Arrangements



The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying the Cisco Travel Network interface. The browser's address bar shows the URL <https://wz1.getthere.net/DispatcherServlet?>. The page features a navigation bar with links for Home, My Account, My Trips, My Templates, Help, and Logout. A user is logged in as Richard Gore. The main content area is titled "Begin Search" and includes a "Select Trip Requirements" section with checkboxes for Flight, Hotel, and Car. Below this is a "Select Trip Type" section with radio buttons for round trip, one way trip, and multiple destination trip. The "Enter Trip Details" section contains fields for departure and arrival airports (SJC), departure and return flights (Iovevus), departure and return times (Morning), and preferences for travel class (Economy) and ticket type (lowest available). A "Begin Search" button is located at the bottom right of the form.

Although the online Cisco Travel Network tool handles approximately 75 percent of employee bookings, some travel arrangements are best handled in a telephone call to one of the corporate travel centers. In a few countries, transient travel arrangements are still handled by local American Express offices because of regulatory or system constraints.

For the 2005 global sales meeting, a special event registration Website linked to the Cisco Travel Network, allowing employees to book flights online. “The global sales meeting places the single-largest demand on our travel centers because of the number of employees involved and the multiple factors that must be accommodated when booking

flights,” says Caroline Strachan, a global project manager for Cisco Corporate Travel. “Although most employees are able to make all arrangements through the meeting’s registration site, approximately 40 percent of the flight bookings involve a call to the travel centers. These calls vary from simple questions about using the online booking tool to requests for help with complex itineraries.”

At the 2005 meeting, online access to the Cisco Travel Network and telephone access to the travel centers was available for the first time at the meeting site. This access enabled Cisco Corporate Travel to deliver another valuable service to Cisco employees as they attended the meeting.

Using the Cisco Network

To replace the previous toll-free and long-distance calls, Cisco maintains one or more local access numbers for employees to reach the travel centers from each country. Calls received on these lines are routed internally over the company WAN to the next available travel counselor within the employee’s world region.

Centralized travel operations and internal call routing also support 24-hour service for employees. In a typical corporate travel environment, the primary call center operates only during standard weekday business hours. By creating regional travel contact centers, Cisco can support 24-hour service from American Express as the single travel vendor. For example, if a Cisco employee calls from Europe after the travel center in the United Kingdom has closed, the call is routed directly to the Cisco U.S. travel center. Similarly, calls can also be routed to the travel center in Sydney, Australia—using the company network eliminates international toll charges. This routing capability also allows overflow of calls as needed among the travel centers during their common operating hours.

Cisco Contact Center Solutions

Cisco has deployed several of its own contact center solutions in the travel centers, including the following:

- Cisco CallManager processes inbound and outbound calls for each travel center over the public switched telephone network (PSTN) and the Cisco WAN as appropriate.
- A Cisco Intelligent Contact Management (ICM) system routes calls to specific travel centers over the Cisco network, based on parameters such as operating hours and real-time availability of a travel counselor. The Cisco ICM system is connected in three world regions via peripheral gateways that direct inbound calls from the Cisco CallManager clusters.
- Cisco IP Contact Center (IPCC) distributes and manages calls within each travel center.
- Cisco IP Interactive Voice Response (IVR) software is used for events, such as the global sales meeting, when employee registrations and travel arrangements are handled by separate vendors. The employee can call a single number assigned to the event, then make selections from the IVR menu for routing the call to the travel center or registration vendor.
- The Cisco E-Mail Manager option queues employee e-mail messages to the travel center for handling by counselors during periods of low call demand. Queuing rules within Cisco IPCC define when counselors are moved from answering calls to answering e-mail in order to meet Cisco’s service quality standards.

Cisco IT uses two Cisco technologies for customizing interactions within the contact centers. First, Cisco customer response applications allow developers to customize the IVR menu, call routing, and call queuing capabilities within each travel center.

The second technology, Cisco Agent Desktop, provides computer-telephony integration (CTI) features that enable more efficient service to callers. For example, when a Cisco employee calls any of the regional travel centers, an IVR prompt asks for keypad entry of the employee ID number. The Cisco Agent Desktop application uses this information to display the employee’s Cisco directory page on the counselor’s monitor while the call is transferred to the counselor’s phone. This allows the counselor to immediately identify the caller and quickly access that employee’s travel profile.

"We estimated that 30 seconds of the employee's time and 30 seconds of the travel counselor's time was spent identifying the employee, searching for the directory listing, then accessing the employee's travel profile," explains Mike Perkin, Cisco travel operations manager for the Europe, Middle East, and Africa (EMEA) region. "By automatically delivering the directory information, we eliminate this time and frustration for both employees and counselors." The directory feature is also important for cross-border transactions due to local differences in how a person's name is presented, such as countries where the family name is considered to be a person's "first name." When an employee's travel is handled in another region, the directory provides invaluable assistance with this small but vital travel requirement.

Reporting Tools

Corporate travel and event managers use a variety of tools to obtain real-time status displays and historical reports on travel center activity. Cisco reporting tools include the Cisco E-Mail Manager Option for the Cisco ICM Enterprise and Cisco IPCC Enterprise editions, which provides real-time monitoring of e-mail queues and historical reports on e-mail messages handled by travel counselors. Cisco WebView software, part of Cisco ICM, provides detailed reports on call activity in the travel centers. These reports help the travel center managers determine optimal staffing levels, especially for events that generate higher call volumes for a limited time.

"Although I am based in Europe, I also have real-time information about our travel centers in the United States, Japan, and Australia at my fingertips. Cisco technology makes a major difference in my work. Without it, I could not deliver the results and control we currently enjoy in handling the travel arrangements for all of our major sales meetings," says Strachan.

RESULTS

Cisco has gained significant, positive results from its efforts to centralize the travel centers and make effective use of the company's WAN and contact center solutions to support travel operations.

Cost savings. By using the Cisco network to route calls from employees to the travel centers, Cisco avoids the expense of international long-distance or toll-free calls. And by offering 24-hour coverage among its own travel centers, Cisco avoids the premium charges for "after-hours" service from a travel company.

Travel center productivity. The application that requests the employee ID number before transferring the call to a counselor saves an average of one minute per call. With approximately 2500 calls handled by just the U.K. and U.S. Cisco travel centers each day, this time savings yields a tremendous improvement in counselor productivity.

Employee satisfaction. Adoption of the Cisco Travel Network has been impressive: currently, more than 75 percent of all travel transactions are handled through this online tool. Employee satisfaction is also higher for how calls are handled by the travel contact center. "Based on feedback received from Cisco employees, the travel center experience is better all around. Employees receive faster and more professional service and the travel counselors can do their job more effectively," says Perkin. Additionally, 99 percent of the global sales meeting transactions are handled online, and 78 percent of the meeting participants have rated the overall travel booking experience as above average or excellent.

Special services for event-related travel. The global sales meeting and other large events involve special issues for employee travel. For example, Cisco's risk-control measures limit the number of employees who may travel on the same flight. The travel system has been customized to offer employees the option of booking one of the group flights (if available) or making individualized travel plans.

The link between the event registration Website and the Cisco Travel Network gives employees a single place for making all event arrangements. Cisco also benefits as a company because the travel application can access

negotiated discounts on airfares, enforce risk-management rules, and issue tickets—in most cases without a call to a Cisco travel center counselor.

The Cisco customer response applications developed by Cisco IT are particularly valuable for recurring but limited-time events, such as the Cisco global sales meeting. Within just a few weeks, the Cisco IT development team created a set of modules tailored for the call-handling needs of this event. These modules are active from the opening date for employee registration until the meeting has ended, then are saved for re-use the following year. The modules can also be modified and enhanced each year based on lessons learned or changes in the event or travel requirements.

Industry Recognition

Based on the results achieved by centralizing travel centers and the company's use of technology, Cisco has won several travel industry awards, including the 2002 Global Vision Award from the Association of Corporate Travel Executives. "Many Cisco corporate customers are interested in our travel program and we share best practices to help those customers improve their own programs," says Perkin.

LESSONS LEARNED

Perkin described the overall impact of using Cisco resources to enhance and streamline corporate travel operations. "We feel the success of the Cisco Travel Network is because the tool is easy and intuitive to use," he says. "We also had a robust communications plan for promoting it to employees. Another advantage is the Cisco corporate culture, which actively promotes the use of Web-based applications to conduct business activity."

The 2005 Cisco global sales meeting has also yielded valuable lessons about extending Cisco's travel centers and applications to smaller corporate events. "We have proven the validity of using online travel tools and enabling our travel centers to support our largest events," says Strachan. "Now we can extend this support to meetings with as few as 10 employee travelers. This helps us to negotiate lower airfares and gives us visibility into potential risks that we wouldn't be able to detect if travelers made arrangements individually."

NEXT STEPS

To further streamline the interaction between employees and travel counselors, Cisco IT and Cisco Corporate Travel Operations plan to implement additional Cisco technologies, including:

- Additional custom applications to serve other corporate events as well as changes in the travel environment.
- Voice recognition capabilities that will allow employees to simply say the employee ID number instead of entering it with the telephone keypad at the beginning of a call.
- Integration with the menu system on Cisco IP Phone 7960 devices to guide employees in using the keypad to navigate through options before calling the travel center, which will further streamline the interaction between the employee and the travel counselor.
- Deployment of the Cisco Collaboration Server in the travel centers, which will enable employees to initiate a voice call from a Cisco Travel Network Webpage or communicate with a travel counselor using online chat.
- Whether for thousands of personnel gathering for an event or a single employee traveling to help a customer, the Cisco Corporate Travel Operations Team will continue to apply Cisco technologies for further cost control and service improvements.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To read the entire case study or for additional Cisco IT case studies on a variety of business solutions, visit Cisco on Cisco: Inside Cisco IT www.cisco.com/go/ciscoit

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