

TRANSFORMING YOUR TRAVEL PROGRAM WORLDWIDE:  
Strategies for Consolidating to a Single Travel Management Company



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This white paper aims to stimulate debate about, and consideration of, consolidation to one travel management company worldwide. By examining key criteria and objectives, it enables organizations to assess both the suitability of such a step, and their readiness to take it. So-called "globalization" may not be appropriate in every case, but for those companies for whom consolidation across multiple markets is a realizable goal, the potential benefits can be significant. Our experience has shown that organizations can achieve best-in-class incremental savings up to 25% as a result of process, technology and sourcing transformations.

There are challenges associated with adopting a universal travel management program. Awareness of the elements that need to be in place within the organization, and of what to look for in a global travel management partner, are pivotal to successful program implementation. This white paper describes the approach taken by 90 companies – of differing sizes, and from a variety of sectors – in selecting a single, global travel management provider.



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# INTRODUCTION

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Political, economic, social and technological changes are creating new business opportunities in the global marketplace every day. And despite the enormous diversity among and even within markets, our research indicates that organizations operating in a multinational environment have universal travel and entertainment (T&E) management needs that transcend cultural and national boundaries.

These organizations also face constant pressure to deliver shareholder value, and so the drive to keep costs at a minimum and turnover at a maximum is always high.

## *Is your company in control of discretionary costs around the world?*

That pressure to deliver value is typically directed towards discretionary or indirect costs, which can reach up to 35% of a company's revenues. T&E can account for 30% of those indirect costs (Source: Killen & Associates).

Reducing or at least containing those costs, while continuing to achieve the best-value return on investment in business-critical activities has become, and will continue to be, a commercial imperative.

## *Is there a way to achieve even better control over discretionary T&E expenditure*

In the current procurement environment, consolidation to a single travel management company is emerging as an increasingly popular means of tightening program control, managing operational infrastructures holistically, and leveraging economies of scale. The combination of these activities in turn drives maximum productivity and efficiencies, consistent service levels and best-in-class savings.

The gap between where an organization stands today and where it could be if business travel costs were reduced through consolidation will clearly vary from company to company, but we have found that organizations can achieve best-in-class incremental savings up to 25% as a result of sourcing, technology and process transformations.

However, selecting what to consolidate, and how to go about it, can present a variety of global, strategic and cultural challenges. Changes in the structure of a corporate travel management program create both risks and opportunities for travelers around the world, and the scale and complexity of those changes require highest level executive sponsorship, and sufficient resources, to manage the program transformation successfully.

# WHAT ARE THE STRATEGIC REASONS TO CONSOLIDATE TO A SINGLE TRAVEL MANAGEMENT COMPANY?

The benefits of a fully-consolidated T&E program manifest themselves in three principal areas: control, service and savings.

To track the requirements of organizations which have already engaged in consolidation at some level, or are considering doing so, American Express Business Travel conducted an in-depth analysis of 90 Requests for Proposal (RFPs) dating from January through May 2006.

Figure 1 illustrates an impressive consistency (95% of cases, or greater) among the eight most frequently requested travel provider competencies. High demand for such support, both among organizations with an air travel spend of \$1-\$10M and those with a spend greater than \$10M, demonstrates widespread acknowledgement of the “building blocks” required for a successful consolidation. Companies that strive to enhance control, service and savings by choosing one travel management partner typically achieve the objectives detailed here.

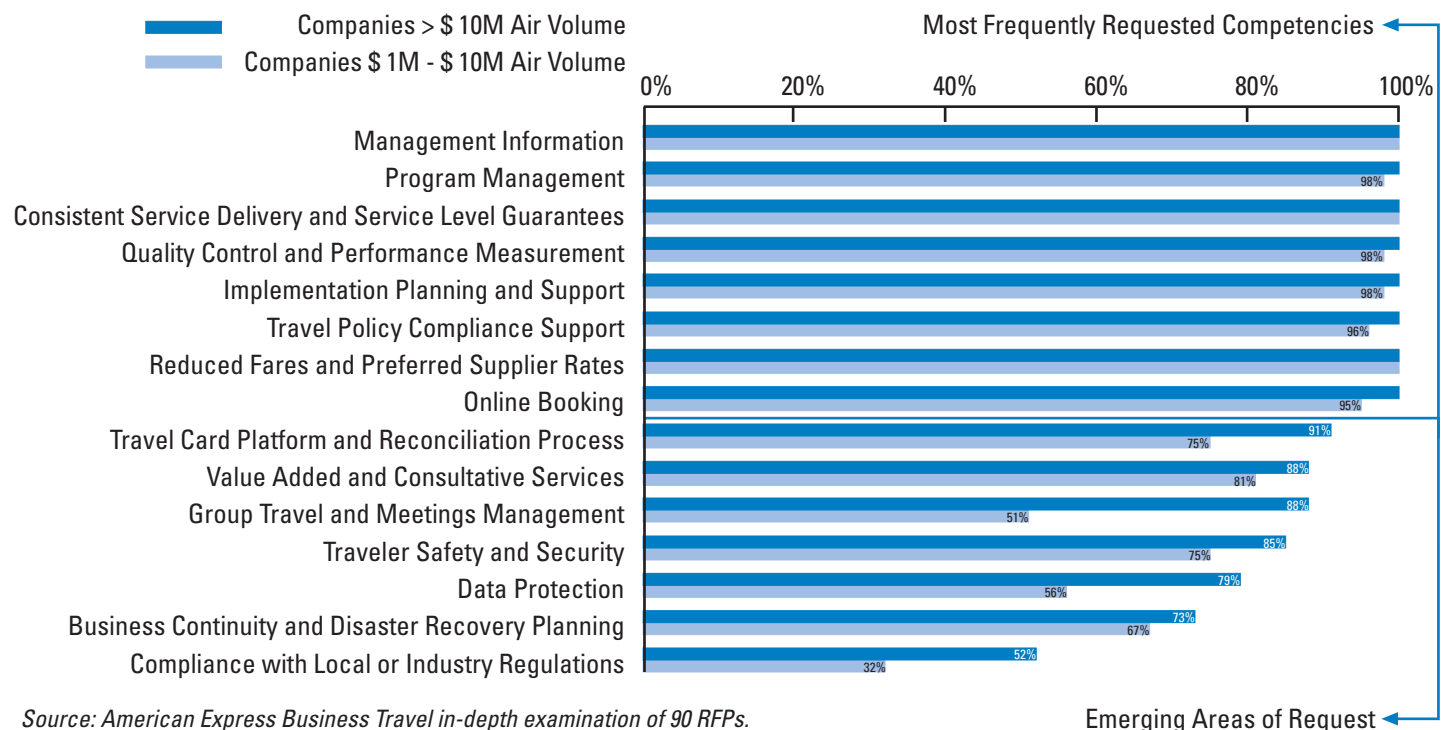
## Data Integrity and Enhanced Traveler Security through Centralized Information Management

Comprehensive data capture and reporting through a secure, consistent network leads to improved visibility of costs and operations around the world. It enables companies to monitor and benchmark key performance data in order to improve process efficiencies, enhance service and drive greater savings.

The first step of the consolidation process requires data gathering to paint a picture of an organization’s current travel program. Without a baseline for expenditure, discounts or costs, it is difficult if not impossible to quantify the real value of consolidation.

Additionally, centralized data through a secure source affords greater traveler safety and security through management information tools that allow an organization to locate travelers on any given day, and enables adoption

Figure 1: Expertise Sought in a Global Travel Management Partner



Source: American Express Business Travel in-depth examination of 90 RFPs.



of data containment practices that ensure sensitive information is safeguarded from tampering or theft. In an emergency, consolidated data retrieval is considerably faster with one travel management company.

**Best-In-Class Results through a Single Source Execution against Goals**

An organization’s ability to drive results and implement changes quickly and effectively is enhanced by working with a single travel partner, with proven experience, who takes a global approach to travel program management. Streamlining program management allows an organization to define performance expectations and set savings and service-consistency goals.

Furthermore, the resultant simplification of the communication process between an organization and its suppliers and employees can reduce the risk of misinterpretations and save considerable time internally. The focus is shifted to results rather than clarification and coordination.

**Consistency and Cost-Avoidance via an Integrated Service Platform**

A consistent program with a single travel partner improves the ability to benchmark and measure performance, because all the diverse program elements are predicated on universal processes, procedures and policies, regardless of geographic location. This approach helps organizations streamline traveler communication and education, while increasing traveler productivity.

Organizations can easily incorporate local/ regional market variations into the program and still maintain a global platform for traveler support and service. Performance measurement will become more effective through a consistent approach to quality across all markets. And finally, organizations can avoid costs associated with inconsistencies in application of negotiated rates, point of sale scripting, refund practices, and so on.

**Maximum Policy Compliance**

Organizations that consolidate with a single travel partner are best positioned to drive compliance because they do not have to coordinate program changes and policy modifications with a multiplicity of contacts. This ability to

manage compliance via “one voice” helps to achieve the objectives in [Figure 2](#). Furthermore, organizations need to demonstrate program control in order to leverage savings with suppliers.

**Leverage with Suppliers**

Negotiating effectively with airlines, hotel companies or car rental groups is heavily dependent upon spend per supplier. Consolidating to a single travel management partner across all markets (or at the very least in those markets that account for the majority of spend) enables an organization to optimize supplier relationships with preferred vendors by leveraging full volume to achieve maximum negotiated savings.

Streamlining and simplifying the supplier management cycle (consultation, assessment, goal-setting, contract negotiations, performance monitoring, benchmarking, and so on) also results in significant time savings.

**Figure 2: Constituent Policy Related Objectives**

Constituent	Policy Related Objectives
Chief Procurement Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitor and move market share to achieve agreed upon levels</li> <li>• Drive and align comprehensive transaction data capture (Air, Hotel, Car), which is a critical component of the negotiation process</li> </ul>
Travel Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicate program changes swiftly and effectively across multiple markets</li> <li>• Increase traveler buy-in and usage levels</li> <li>• Identify, communicate and enforce cost avoidance measures</li> </ul>
Traveler	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand management’s expectations and travel alternatives at point of sale</li> </ul>

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## THE CONSOLIDATION DECISION

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While the argument for multinational organizations to consolidate T&E operations may be strong, the decision-making process involves a range of complex strategic and tactical issues.

When contemplating consolidation to a single travel management partner, organizations should consider, among other elements:

- The current and foreseeable future condition of the overall organization, and any activities that might conflict with – or complement – travel management consolidation.
- Management willingness to accommodate regional differences in business travel management practices, and regional willingness to accept mandates from central headquarters.
- The key risks involved in consolidation – including possible commercial and operational challenges – and its impact on travelers and other key stakeholders.
- The potential savings, trade-offs, and other benefits, both quantifiable and qualitative, of consolidation.
- The establishment of an appropriate and realistic timeline, and of the requirements and performance measures fundamental to successful implementation.
- The implementation process itself – can or should a program be phased in over time or by region, and can implementation be linked to other corporate initiatives?
- The selection criteria involved in appointing a travel management partner.

While some of these issues can only be addressed by the organization itself, others will be fully examined in the next section of this white paper.

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## WHAT MUST ORGANIZATIONS HAVE IN PLACE TO IMPLEMENT AN EFFECTIVE CONSOLIDATED PROGRAM?

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Organizations embarking on the process of multinational T&E consolidation must establish precise goals, from the outset, to ensure that the transformation fully supports all business objectives. As a first step, it is essential to invest the time and resources to develop a consolidation strategy.

[Figure 3](#) outlines one approach to strategy development, beginning with management endorsement and a cost/benefit exercise. From there, an organization should evaluate the existing T&E program, its purposes, overall structure, and regional variations contained within it.

Gathering data to capture current activity and spend is critical to benchmarking success over time. Considerations might include the nature and number of the deals in place, the nature of the existing policy (or policies), and internal rates of online adoption and of touchless versus high-touch transactions.

Quantifying the benefits of consolidation and clarifying objectives will help build a strong business case for senior leadership. The strategy process concludes with the creation and execution of a comprehensive project plan.

Beyond strategy, confronting organizational strengths and weaknesses is essential to understanding how to approach the implementation process. The elements which factor into the development and delivery of a successful program will vary from organization to organization, but the causes of most internal challenges encountered during consolidation are shown in [Figure 4](#).

To manage the implementation pitfalls and realize the full potential of a consolidated travel management program, organizations should ensure that the following elements are in place.

### Senior Management Endorsement

Creating a global T&E program requires consistency across the organization, and necessitates change management relating to processes, applications and relationships. To make the transition to a holistic program an effective one, management must mandate adoption of the new program elements. Without enforcement from the highest levels, travelers will be less likely to



“buy in” to the program, compliance will be compromised, and the organization will be unable to maximize cost-savings, economies of scale, operational efficiencies and traveler productivity. Senior leadership must reinforce the notion that creating a consolidated program will necessitate making decisions, some of which will run counter to individual preferences, for the good of the whole organization.

### Clear Objectives, Shared Expectations and Consistent Communication

An organization should have clearly-defined objectives for key program elements such as cost-savings, quality standards, policy stipulations and online adoption. To enable the travel management company to act as a strategic business partner, clear expectations must be articulated and mutual agreement must be reached on priorities, procedures and tactics for attaining goals. Additionally, consistent, organization-wide benchmarks to evaluate progress and performance must be defined in advance.

Perhaps even more importantly, this information must be communicated consistently to the organization’s key constituencies, especially regional/divisional management and travelers, whose behavior will have a direct impact

on the success of the program. Keeping all stakeholders informed of the rationale for change, service expectations, procedure and policy stipulations, and program goals and results will raise traveler/divisional buy-in and help achieve objectives.

### Management Information and Sourcing Strategy

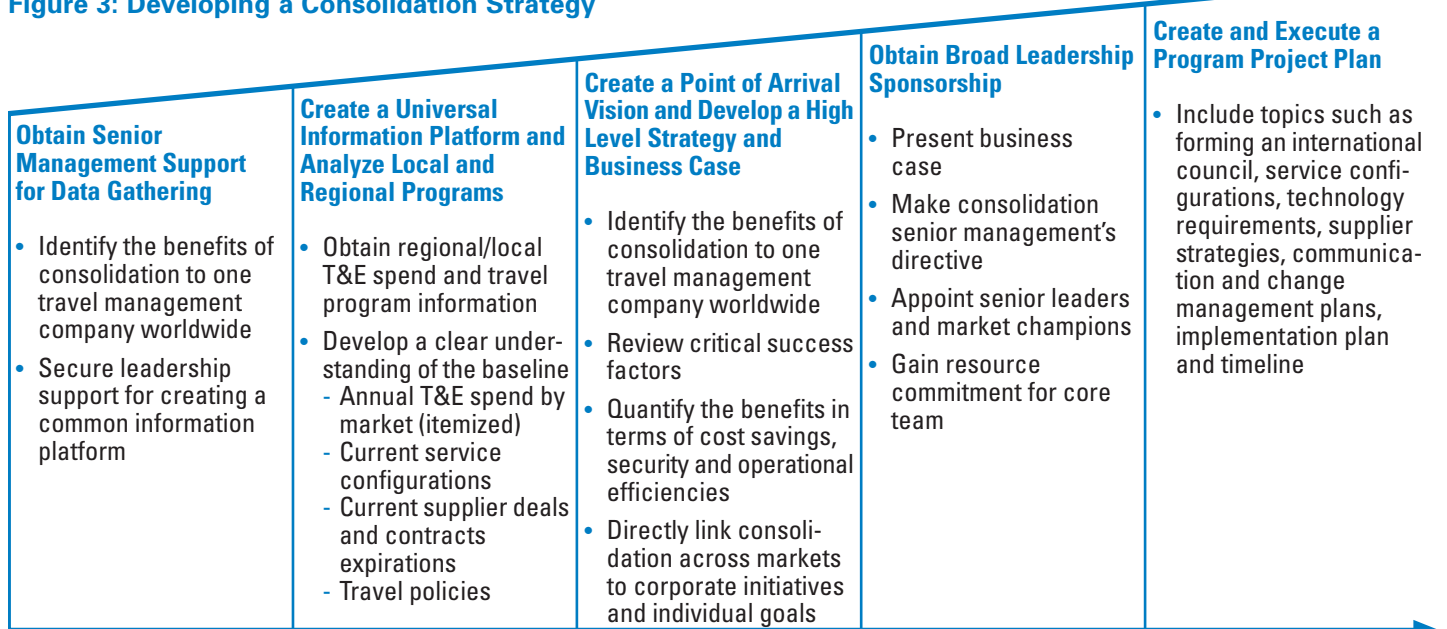
The first step toward establishing an air and hotel strategy, for both transient travel and meetings, is to gather consolidated data on total spend or, at the very least, on spend in all major markets. This essential information enables the organization to identify travel patterns and, through them, the opportunities available in choosing preferred partners and creating alliances worldwide. Suppliers are more likely to engage favorably with an organization which can drive share through strong and demonstrated program control.

Reliable, comprehensive management information is also key to establishing a baseline for tracking future spend and measuring savings.

### Program Ownership

Internal accountability for the travel function on a regional basis, but with centralized leadership, helps considerably to launch an effective campaign. Although executive

**Figure 3: Developing a Consolidation Strategy**



# WHAT SHOULD ORGANIZATIONS LOOK FOR IN A GLOBAL TRAVEL MANAGEMENT PARTNER?

endorsement is imperative in gaining traveler buy-in, regional program “ownership” will encourage greater compliance – and improve program performance at a local level. Any centrally managed function will face many challenges, from simple differences in culture, language, technology, and even time zones, to more ingrained operational and divisional variations. Champions at the regional level, with strong ties to central leadership, will significantly enhance program viability. In the critical area of moving market share to support preferred supplier agreements, such regional champions are particularly well-placed to drive policy compliance.

## Travel Policy

A uniform travel policy, which nevertheless incorporates local nuances, is the cornerstone of any global travel program. Consistent rules governing travelers and meeting delegates, while taking their expectations and requirements into account, leads to greater consistency of service delivery (potentially lowering costs in the process) and enables an organization to establish performance goals. Without clearly-defined objectives, performance levels cannot be easily determined, nor measured with any accuracy.

**Figure 4: Internal Consolidation Challenges**

Internal Challenges that Organizations Typically Face When Consolidating Travel Management
Executive endorsement at the headquarter and country level
Consensus building and consistency across borders and business divisions
Understanding and clarity of expectations and success criteria
Cultural and language differences affecting communication and interpretation
Behavioral change management due to fear or the unknown or strong alliance to current providers
Harmonizing priorities with regards to timelines and fully assigned resources
Gathering data and supporting information
Balancing central versus regional needs and priorities

Once the decision to consolidate has been made, an organization can begin the process of identifying an appropriate global travel management partner.

The eight most frequently-requested travel provider competencies identified earlier (see [Figure 1](#)) form the basis for this section of the white paper. However, it is important to mention that our research also highlighted *emerging* areas of expertise sought in a global travel management provider.

Overall, fewer organizations requested support ranging from “value-added and consultative services” to “compliance with local or industry regulations”. Demand for such emerging competencies was strongest among organizations with higher air travel expenditure, suggesting that the requirement may be proportionally related to an organization’s air volume and global reach.

In today’s environment, however, services such as data protection, traveler safety, and business continuity and disaster recovery planning – which also fell outside the top eight requirements – are essentials, regardless of an organization’s size and its range of travel.

Finally, the industry in which an organization operates may drive subtle preferences for different elements of travel management support. RFP data was broken down into seven industries as part of our research: financial services, professional services, government and non-profit, industrial and automotive, pharmaceutical and medical products, consumer goods, and technology and communications. While there was a high degree of consistency across all sectors, [Figure 5](#) highlights the areas of greatest variance. In summary, our RFP research highlighted the travel management competencies with greatest implications for consolidation.

## Management Information

As has already been established, management information serves as a fundamental component in any T&E consolidation program. A travel management partner’s network should be able to support centralized technology tools – both end-user (traveler) and enabler (agent) applications – that facilitate communication on travel program specifics, leverage economies of scale, and enhance service to travelers. A travel management company uses manage-



ment information to help enforce policy compliance at the point of sale and beyond, and should provide regular and timely reports of non-compliance.

Additionally, the travel management partner should be able to gather comprehensive data on traveler activity and trip status – elements that are essential to ensuring traveler security and allow employers to adopt a proactive stance in the event of potential threats to traveler safety. An effective travel partner should be able easily, accurately and routinely to provide consolidated information through a single, secure data warehouse, and to share this information via sophisticated Web-enabled capabilities and management information tools.

### **Program Management**

Program management support on a global scale is as important as the en-route services for travelers. Pivotal to the structure is a strategically-minded global program management leader directing a team of local managers around the world.

To develop and deliver a successful travel program, organizations should look for a partner with intellectual capital and expertise across all major markets, particularly in the areas of overall management, consultative services and reservation operations.

### **Consistent Service Delivery and Quality**

An effective travel partner will offer local traveler support through a stable base of service operations around the world, with a strong presence in the client's key markets. In today's sometimes uncertain travel environment, it is also important that the travel company has significant resources in all markets, and can provide emergency services for travelers in remote locations, as well as those in major developed-world centers. Key to service delivery is a travel management company's emphasis on quality control and performance measurement.

### **Implementation Planning and Support**

The process of moving to a consolidated multinational travel program carries both risks and opportunities, and it is consequently essential to appoint a travel management partner with strong project management capabilities,

with an emphasis on speed and quality of implementation, to reduce the adverse impacts inherent in change.

Before even beginning the implementation process, a travel management company must be prepared and equipped to undertake a full analysis of all potential risks, both in terms of their probability and their likely impact. Successful implementation ensures that the travel management company can drive travel policy compliance and preferred supplier deals at point-of-sale around the world.

### **Reduced Fares and Preferred Supplier Rates**

Managing supplier relationships at a local or regional level can create divergence between an organization's global requirements and objectives and those of individual markets. It is important, therefore, to select a travel management partner with strategic sourcing expertise, solid global buying power, centralized ownership with executive-level contacts, and strong local relationships in all markets. Adopting an internationally-managed supplier strategy helps to achieve optimum negotiated savings through economies of scale. This approach also allows the client organization to factor regional market variations into a travel program without adversely impacting the achievement of global objectives.

### **Online Booking**

A strong travel management partner will have a demonstrable track record of ongoing investment in technology supporting the migration to an online/interactive/e-fulfillment environment, and will be well positioned to adopt new technology applications to meet traveler needs. Interactive booking products and e-fulfillment processes drive down costs, and thus it is important that the chosen partner should have the ability and expertise to drive online penetration and e-fulfillment support in markets where evolving airline regulations and emerging customer needs may vary considerably.

The potential travel partner should have centralized resources, an employee base dedicated to implementing, administering and supporting new-technology applications, and demonstrated expertise in managing the transition from a traditional to an online environment, coupled with extensive knowledge of market-appropriate booking tools.



### Travel Card Platform and Reconciliation Process

Reconciliation is the final stage of the travel purchase process, enabling an organization to make post-trip checks on employees' compliance with policies. It allows enforcement measures to be taken both at the point of reservation (travel) and the point of payment (company card). Organizations should identify a travel management partner who can streamline the reconciliation process to reduce costs while ensuring the highest levels of data privacy and security.

### Value Added and Consultative Services

Travel management companies may provide varying degrees of advisory support around policy, strategic sourcing and process management. A travel partner can add substantial value by helping organizations assess, design, implement and sustain these elements of the consolidation program. Most importantly, the travel management company should be able to implement

travel management solutions which drive bottom-line business value and create tangible returns on investment.

### Group Travel and Meetings Management

Centralized procurement of both transient travel and meetings travel under the corporate travel policy umbrella not only delivers savings in and of itself, but also increases purchasing power and supports post-program tracking. The travel management partner is well positioned to select meetings destinations and sites that provide greatest leverage against existing preferred travel supplier relationships, and should apply key competencies to drive further savings, primarily through meetings policy compliance and process improvements. Enhanced contract management can also reduce risk and liability.

### Data Protection and Traveler Safety

Data integrity and traveler security are essential in today's business environment. Organizations have a corporate

**Figure 5: Expertise Sought in a Global Travel Management Partner – by Industry**

Competencies Requested	Average of all Industries	Financial Services	Professional Services	Government & Non-Profit	Industrial & Automotive	Pharmaceutical & Medical Products	Consumer Goods	Technology & Communication
Management Information	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Program Management	99%	100%	100%	100%	95%	100%	100%	100%
Consistent Service Delivery and Service Level Guarantees	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Quality Control and Performance Measurement	99%	100%	100%	100%	95%	100%	100%	100%
Implementation Planning and Support	99%	100%	94%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Travel Policy Compliance Support	96%	100%	100%	83%	100%	100%	89%	100%
Reduced Fares and Preferred Supplier Rates	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Online Booking	93%	100%	100%	50%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Travel Card Platform and Reconciliation Process	80%	83%	88%	67%	76%	67%	89%	89%
Value Added and Consultative Services	85%	92%	76%	83%	81%	83%	100%	79%
Group Travel and Meetings Management	69%	83%	65%	67%	52%	100%	67%	53%
Traveler Safety and Security	85%	92%	76%	100%	62%	100%	89%	74%
Data Protection	64%	100%	76%	50%	48%	50%	67%	58%
Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery Planning	66%	83%	88%	33%	57%	50%	89%	63%
Compliance with Local or Industry Regulations	41%	58%	29%	100%	43%	17%	11%	32%

■ Significant % points above average of all industries  
■ Significant % points below average of all industries

Source: American Express Business Travel in-depth examination of 90 RFPs.

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## CONCLUSION

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social responsibility or “duty of care” to ensure proper practices and procedures are in place to protect employees. Any travel management partner must be held accountable for security of, among other things, traveler data, financial information, and sensitive information relating to corporate activities generally.

Organizations themselves must be certain their chosen travel partner houses all transactional data and operations on a secure global network that allows them to protect sensitive data from theft or tampering; complies with increasingly-stringent data protection laws; and is able to activate a business continuity and disaster recovery program at a moment’s notice.

### **Compliance with Local or Industry Regulations**

Consolidation paves the way for greater visibility of business travel activity, thus improving an organization’s ability to meet corporate social responsibility and Sarbanes-Oxley compliance requirements. The process by which organizations record and document T&E expenses is of material importance to government regulators and corporate executives who must now certify personally that the proper internal controls not only exist, but also work.

Organizations operating around the world must make sure their travel partner is a financially viable organization with a stable base of corporate-owned locations. Differences in standard business practices around the world make the management of a global T&E program a complex undertaking, so choosing a partner with jurisdiction over its locations (as opposed to one can merely influence a loose and frequently-changing group of affiliates) is critical. The chosen travel management company must possess and communicate local knowledge of industry regulations and legislation that impact the client organization.

Success in consolidating with a single travel management partner is dependent on giving the same attention, and attaching the same importance, to consolidation strategy and its implementation process as any other significant change management project. A business-critical decision that has such an impact, on such a wide range of key constituents, should form an integral part of an organization’s procurement planning strategy.

This white paper set out to explain how consolidation can generate maximum positive results in terms of operational efficiency, service, and cost reduction and avoidance. It also highlighted the pitfalls typically associated with implementing a universal travel management program.

Ultimately, an organization must determine its own most favorable path to consolidation, whether that represents embarking on a fully global program or integrating operations over time or by region. Either way, travel management consolidation is a progression – and an opportunity – which demands highest-level consideration.

### **2006 RFP Research Methodology**

American Express Business Travel conducted an in depth examination of 90 Requests for Proposal (RFPs) dating from January - May 2006. Statistics were captured around the most frequently requested RFP topics. The research results highlight consistent and emerging areas of expertise that companies are seeking in a global travel management company.

The sample set was broken into two peer groups comprising companies within \$1-10M in air volume spend and >\$10M in air volume spend in order to illustrate behavioral variances. Air volumes specified in company RFPs corresponded to the regions in which the company was requesting support from a travel management company. The volumes do not necessarily represent total global air volume per company.

Finally, data from the sample set was filtered into the following industry peer groups: Financial Services, Professional Services, Government and Non-Profit, Industrial and Automotive, Pharmaceutical and Medical Products, Consumer Goods, and Technology and Communication.

## About American Express Business Travel

American Express Business Travel, a division of the American Express Company, is dedicated to providing peace of mind to clients as they achieve the greatest possible value from their investment in travel through increased cost savings, outstanding customer service and greater spend control. For small businesses, medium-sized enterprises and multinational corporations, American Express Business Travel provides a combination of industry-leading booking technology, travel management consulting expertise, strategic sourcing and supplier negotiation support, and customer service available around the world, around the clock, online and offline.

American Express operates one of the world's largest travel agency networks with over 2,200 travel service locations in over 140 countries and territories worldwide. The Company processed over \$20 billion in global travel sales in 2005.

American Express Company is a diversified worldwide travel, financial and network services company founded in 1850. It is a world leader in charge and credit cards, Travelers Cheques, travel, business services and international banking.

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