

Five Steps to Maximize your Online Booking Strategy

a CWT white paper

How CWT can help optimize your travel program

Investment in an online booking tool may or may not be the right strategy for your company. Or it simply may not be the right time.

To help your company decide whether to invest and ultimately, to maximize your online booking strategy, Carlson Wagonlit Travel (CWT) has developed a five-step methodology which capitalizes on its experience in North America and deep-seated knowledge of the European business travel market. The methodology takes companies through each step of online implementation, from initial definition of strategy to roll-out and program management for rapid adoption.

CWT's five-step methodology toward online adoption

• Step 1: Definition of strategy

Companies must first determine **if online booking is the appropriate way to go** for their business travel. To this end, they should consider whether their employees are culturally and technically ready.

For this, CWT can assist clients with:

Readiness studies: focused interviews and workshops with the company's business travelers, travel arrangers, IT staff and CWT consultants in order to gain in-depth understanding of the company's front and back-office processes, gauge the level of acceptance and readiness for change, and determine whether an online booking tool can respond to the company's specific requirements.

If online booking *is* the appropriate way to go, the next step will be to determine **which solution to implement**. This will involve much more than simply selecting an online booking tool. Companies need to determine where the tool could be implemented most effectively (in which countries and/or business units), the type of travel content to be included (air, train, hotel, car, etc.), the range of suppliers and distributors to be used (single or multiple GDS, direct links, etc.), and the tools to be integrated into the booking engine (electronic requests, expense management, traveler profiling, hotel databases, etc.).

The other prime consideration will be whether this investment is actually going to result in significant savings. Companies will need to weigh the anticipated outlay for the online booking tool's installation and recurring costs against the **expected savings**. Our recent handbook, *Toward Excellence in Online Booking*, which presents the results of the CWT Travel Management Institute's research initiative into online booking, offers valuable insights on this subject. Our findings indicated, for example, that in more than half of the companies surveyed, the payback of the investment occurred in less than one year.

Only with this complete analysis in mind can companies find the optimum solution to fulfill their specific requirements.

CWT can assist clients with their selection by providing:

Only a complete analysis allows companies to find the optimum solution

▪ **Benchmarking:** an in-depth analysis of online booking tools available in the company's regional market and a comparison grid of key functionalities matching the company's needs.



- **ROI analysis:** a three-year simulation of the costs and benefits of implementing an online booking tool, using in-depth studies of the company's business and behavioral patterns.
- **Presentations:** an array of solutions offered by online booking tool providers.
- **Request for proposal outsourcing:** management of the selection process, from definition and creation of the request for proposal, to analysis and comparison of all responses, including ROI evaluation.
- **Contract reviews:** thorough reviews of all contract clauses and analyses of potential implications for the company.
- **Implementation planning:** detailed project plans in line with the company's specific requirements.

• Step 2: Technical implementation

At this stage, a company will have decided on an online booking tool; its initial scope in terms of geography, business units, type of travel content and other tools to be integrated; and a timeline for implementation. **The aim here is to "build" the solution.**

This phase can be relatively complex because it involves translating business needs into technical processes. Even for those companies with clear travel policies and processes, this may represent a challenge. Companies have to decide on display priorities, information flows, and many other business issues that need to be defined in detail in order to program the booking tool. Finally, companies may find that the implementation of online booking will have some impact on offline processes. Therefore, it is important to look at all booking processes to ensure consistency.

For this second step, CWT offers:

- **Technical support:** designed on a case-by-case basis, this will include making traveler profiles available, creating links to CWT operations and ensuring all steps are thoroughly tested.
- **CWT's unique and complete project support:** our experts manage the project on both the technical and the business side, ensuring the tool is set up according to the company's specifications.

• Step 3: Roll-out

This is when an online booking tool can be activated. To initiate the roll-out, the company should start with a limited number of pilot users to minimize risk, potential errors and/or bugs. Once the solution is ready for deployment, the roll-out can begin and business units and/or countries can be activated in a programmed, sequential approach.

At this stage, the re-application of Step 2, *technical implementation*, may be necessary if the scope of implementation is gradually expanded to include new dimensions (country, business unit, GDS, tool parameters, etc.).

During this third step, CWT offers:

- **Pilot tracking:** CWT plans and launches the pilot and tracks its progress through review meetings, feedback sheets and tracking of individual users. We also provide synthesis reports during and on completion of the pilot.
- **Roll-out project management:** CWT manages the roll-out process, ensuring that all parties are aligned and the program is running according to plan. Fine-tuning both the approach to roll-out and the planning are accomplished through meetings and workshops with the client.

• Step 4: Communication and change management

Since communication and change management are crucial to successful online booking implementation, this process should begin *early* and be *ongoing* during implementation and roll-out. The tendency, however, is for many companies to underestimate the impact of change management programs. **The aim is not only to keep online users and potential users informed, but to build momentum for the project and appoint champions to promote online booking.**

For this fourth step, CWT offers:

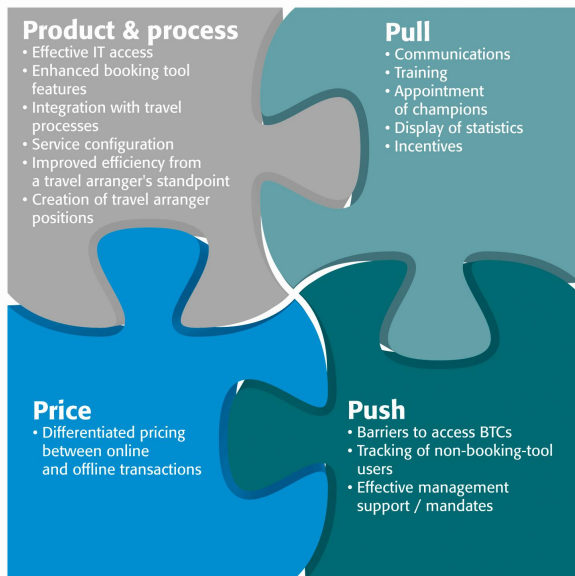
- **Training:** delivered in various formats, training includes "face-to-face" sessions in small or large groups, webcasts, and/or pre-recorded demonstrations and trainings.
- **Communication materials:** presentation booklets and client-specific materials developed with the client team are provided.

- **Step 5: Performance measurement and program management**

Once the online booking tool is up and running, it must then be tracked and optimized.

For this fifth step, CWT offers:

- **Dashboards:** to define key performance indicators that allow the company to track the progress of its online program and determine the processes and tools (data collection and reporting methods, links to databases) to increase adoption levels.
- **Optimization assistance:** based on the “4Ps,” key drivers to boost online adoption as outlined in the CWT handbook, *Toward Excellence in Online Booking*.



The “4Ps”

- **Product and process audit:** detailed audit of tool functionalities and overall performance compared to expectations, route-by-route assessments and process documentation.
- **Price:** communication of online versus offline differences in pricing to infrequent or non-users.
- **Push:** CWT helps companies implement mandates, providing input on appropriate text, online-user incentives, channels for communications and timing.
- **Pull:** training and communication packages.

For more information about CWT's five-step methodology and details on how our online experts can help your company, please contact your account manager or e-mail: onlineconsulting@carlsonwagonlit.com

