

Sasol Germany

Online booking integrated in a process chain

Online booking the clever way. Sasol Germany has integrated the cytric booking platform with the backend (SAP), creating a continuous process chain stretching from booking through invoicing and controlling to reporting. The German office of the South African group has broken new ground with its holistic approach.



Sasol is by no means a pioneer of online booking per se. The 2200 staff of this chemical company have only had the means to book their business travel needs online since early 2005. Where online booking is concerned, "late but better" is the motto of Karl-Heinz Fischer, Manager of Administration Services in Hamburg.

„We weren't looking for an island solution to online booking“, says Fischer. So together with employees Susanne Frevert and Volker Reske, the IT department responsible for SAP/HR, they took a leap forward. Using the cCS (cytric Companion for SAP) interface, developed by Ixult, they built a bridge between the online booking tool and the group's ERP software, in this case SAP. The main advantage: the entire process of online business travel booking is online. Booking is via cytric while accounting of expenses implements SAP's „FI/TV“ module, with all financial data being directly available in SAP after the booking transaction. HR and travel management can tailor all controlling and reporting activities in SAP to their specific requirements. The interface is especially useful for Sasol staff when filing travel

expenses: journey data, for example destination, reason and expense code including the amount, are available in SAP from cytric immediately after the booking has been made without the need for re-entry. Errors arising from double entry are a thing of the past.

If a booking is cancelled in cytric, the journey number and associated data is also cancelled automatically online in SAP.

This data synchronisation between SAP and cytric also has advantages for the travel software. Master data are transmitted automatically from SAP to cytric. For example: if a staff member leaves the company his cytric account is also blocked simultaneously.

Cost centre changes don't need to be updated in cytric. Karl-Heinz Fischer says: „We were looking for a total electronic process, without paper.“ In his opinion the solution as implemented in Germany is „a big step forward.“ The upshot has been to slash internal processing costs.

Pushing integration: the initial objective of Sasol travel management was to implement as many sales processes online as possible. So the group integrated not only cytric but also other electronic sales platforms for flights, rail, car rental and hotel companies. „We wanted to keep staff workloads down,“ says Fischer, adding, "online booking should not involve too much clicking.“ It meant taking one more step: creating one central online tool to replace many. Now all external booking applications are integrated in cytric. Sasol accepts the downside, i.e. that bookings previously made free of charge directly with the service provider now generate costs via cytric. Although BTI, the service providing travel agent, adjusted its transaction fee

to reflect the advantage of centralised booking, making the change-over absolutely worthwhile in the opinion of Karl-Heinz Fischer. Ultimately, the company saves process costs by its single tool strategy.

The choice of cytric from i:FAO was quickly made by Sasol in Germany. „We simply like it better than all competing products,“ says Mr Fischer. Other reasons also include its market leadership, the large number of installations active world-wide, the simplicity of changing travel agents, the ASP principle, the automatic selection of low-cost carriers, the wide range of interfaces and the built-in reporting. The Manager Administration Services gives due praise to BTI, the travel partner, which played an active role in supporting the introduction of online booking.

Everyone at Sasol regards the introduction of online booking as a definite success. A 25 % online booking rate for air travel was actually reached after only three months, way before the one year anticipated, despite line capacity restrictions preventing two of the six German sites going „BTI online“ - cytric's official name in its Sasol implementation. For rail tickets the company has already reached an online booking rate of 60 per cent. It is pointed out that online bookings cost Sasol half as much as telephone bookings.

Low processing costs are obviously a plus, but Karl-Heinz Fischer thinks the potential savings in absolute procurement costs are even better. Sasol is now buying air tickets much cheaper than in the old offline days, with savings of more than 30 per cent. Fischer says, " people used to grab a phone and book a flight. Now things are much more transparent, and the 1000 Sasol employees with travel requirements,

including 700 frequent travellers, can see immediately which alternatives are available and can buy accordingly." „Good deals are good for the company," says Oliver Schnitzendöbel, contact person for all users of the online booking system. Since travel management went professional three years ago, Sasol has cut its purchasing costs from external service providers by half.

When Sasol introduced online booking it was initially voluntary. That has changed. Ticket buying via the intranet is now mandated in all five locations. Anyone who makes a telephone booking receives a reminder to make their next booking online. And all invoices for offline bookings are now marked accordingly.

Sasol adopted its own very effective approach to staff training for the online tool. Instead of group training, Oliver Schnitzendöbel arranged short one-on-one sessions. Oliver's phone rings two or three times a week with people calling to tell him that they have found a cheaper rate on the internet - although they are usually wrong. Oliver Schnitzendöbel: „The change to cytric went much smoother than we expected."

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