

Schwäbisch Hall

## „Online Booking has Huge Potential“

Building and loan association goes state-of-the-art: on 1 April 2005 Germany's largest building society switched to online intranet travel booking. Telephone bookings are limited to a few exceptions. A move very much worth Schwäbisch Hall's while. Travel manager Andreas Urban looks forward to savings of several tens of thousands of Euros per year.



Andreas Urban can be blunt. „It's either everything or nothing for me,“ says the Schwäbisch Hall building society Travel Manager. As of 1 April 2005 Andreas Urban switched all travel bookings at Schwäbisch Hall to cytric, the online booking tool. Employees of Germany's largest building society now book flights, hotel rooms, rental cars and train tickets exclusively via cytric, the online travel booking system developed by i:FAO. The around 1,000 travellers within the Schwäbisch Hall group can now only use the telephone for specific exceptions: for group travel, for round trips with more than four vias, persons new to the group who have not yet been issued with a company credit card and when systems are down. Andreas Urban: „If you are offering online booking, you have to go the whole way to reap all the benefits.“ Andreas Urban (33) has absolutely no doubts that online travel booking is the way forward. „The cost and process gains mean there are simply no alternatives.“ He is convinced that „in 5 to 10 years time, online booking will be the standard for business travel in many major companies.“

The rigorous switch-over to the state-of-the-art in travel management has already generated real savings for the building society. The travel agent implant at Schwäbisch Hall closed its doors at year-end 2004. Having only one full-time staffer created problems when that person was absent, with a replacement having to be sent to Schwäbisch Hall. Since the start of 2005, Schwäbisch Hall staff members can contact the TQ3 Business Travel Centre in Nuremberg if they need backup.

The travel volume of Germany's largest building society (6.6 million customers, 3,300 workforce) is around Euro 3 million per annum in Germany alone. A large fraction of the travel budget is spent on railways, a lot on the stretch from HQ to Hamburg where the VR Kreditwerk subsidiary has a large regional office for the north of Germany.

Andreas Urban had a close look at "employee self service booking systems" in 2002, but found nothing satisfactory. "Those systems were simply not fully developed". In 2004 he analysed the products available again, and went for cytric. From a practitioner's standpoint, the i:FAO product boasts several advantages:

cytric is not just one application of many from a large corporation, but a product developed by a specialist. cytric offers a user-friendly licensing model. Andreas Urban: „We profit from an excellent price-performance ratio.“ Version v7 now offers levels of functionality and user-friendliness which can satisfy even the needs of staff members unfamiliar with online travel booking. Mr Urban also likes cytric's speed of product development. „The fact that there are eight to nine releases per year is

important for our sense of security, because it demonstrates that the product is subject to ongoing development."

Andreas Urban and Schwäbisch Hall have the feeling that their product suggestions are heard by cytric developers and acted on. For example: Schwäbisch Hall proposed that car rental providers should be presented on the start page, saving an extra click. This improvement is already in practice: "The product is flexible, it is developing very rapidly."

Schwäbisch Hall chose to become a direct client of i:FAO because Travel Manager Andreas Urban wanted to stay "independent of travel agents". cytric kicked things off in June 2004 with a small test-user group. In September all staff were provided with access, but online was only an option. Travel Management got the message across about the new travel booking system in several ways, and also pointed out that it would soon be obligatory. With some success: 50 to 60 per cent of all bookings were made online even before the travel agent implant closed at the end of 2004 and cytric became the central tool. Andreas Urban appraises the resonance amongst his staff for the new tool as being "overwhelmingly positive", even if there were a few niggling problems. Some co-workers felt ill-at-ease because they were just one click away from triggering a booking - a responsibility they had not known previously. Andreas Urban and a member of the Travel Management staff acted as points of contact for hesitant colleagues.

Another interesting point: some staff were too impatient using the tool, clicking too quickly. But Andreas Urban and his small team were able to clear matters up quickly by referring to the cytric help section.

A small in-house fair scheduled in autumn 2005 for service providers, including i:FAO, will ultimately answer all open questions.

Andreas Urban was able to present a rock solid business case for online booking in his company. If all Schwäbisch Hall staff booked online the company could save several tens of thousands of Euro every year. „No company can afford to ignore a cost savings potential of this order,“ says the Travel Manager with an eye to the future. He is also thinking about how corporate online travel booking will change. The goal must ultimately be to develop a really simple tool. After entering travel data with starting point and destination, the system should offer three journey choices taking all available service providers into account: the fastest, the cheapest and one custom, based on a personal profile. Mr Urban firmly believes that this kind of simplification will come, and the field of “employee self service” in the travel sector will grow strongly. Because he is a practitioner and he knows that from a corporate standpoint this is something which has hardly even started yet. “The potential of online travel booking is still a closed book to many companies.”

Contact:

i:FAO Group  
Clemensstrasse 9  
60487 Frankfurt am Main  
Germany

Telephone +49 (69) 7680-5500  
Fax +49 (69) 7680-5555  
eMail [info@ifao.net](mailto:info@ifao.net)  
[www.cytric.info](http://www.cytric.info)

