

Computacenter AG & Co. oHG

Online is 70 per cent cheaper than offline

The IT service company Computacenter considerably reduced its transaction cost thanks to online booking with cytric. Initial reservations were soon dispelled and the solution has gained major acceptance amongst staff in Germany.



Innovation is the name of the game in this company: staff at Europe's leading IT infrastructure service provider (formerly CC CompuNet) register their holidays online, use the intranet to record their travel expenses, and click to reserve conference rooms. Every department has its own intranet, and all of the company's know-how is managed in a central document management system. Using modern tools to optimise their working lives is the norm for the around 3600 staff in Germany. The parent company, Computacenter plc has its headquarters in London. With around 10,000 staff, the company generated Euro 3.5 billion turnover in 2004.

Given their enthusiasm for innovation, it is no surprise that most of the around 400 frequent travellers in Germany did not take up the offer of online coaching when their company implemented the cytric booking tool from i:FAO in February 2005: "Most of the staff taught themselves how to use cytric", says Wiltrud Strecker, Computacenter Travel Manager who works in the Facility Management department at the German head office in Kerpen. Only 50 Computacenter staff took advantage of the ninety minute online training course to learn how to use the new tool. "Not surprising as we are

already used to booking our holidays online," explains Wiltrud Strecker. Four months after launching cytric, 45 per cent of all flights are now already booked online at Computacenter.

This is a remarkable adoption rate because online booking at Computacenter has a chequered history. Four years ago, when it was still part of General Electric, the company used the Group tool originally designed for the American market. Staff in Germany were not convinced. "The employees were very dissatisfied," recalls Wiltrud Strecker, "there were considerable reservations against online booking, and so a lot of critical questions were raised when we revived the idea."

Because of the low level of acceptance of the American system, the IT service company returned to telephone and e-mail booking. Following the take-over of the company by Computacenter in 2003, Wiltrud Strecker resurrected the idea of online booking. She checked to see what German travel management companies had to offer in the way of business travel eProcurement. The business travel expert was looking for a system which met all of the IT service provider's requirements: it should be "self-explanatory", i.e. easy to operate, and able to integrate several travel services within one booking (flight, hotel, hire car and rail). In future, this travel portal for Computacenter staff should also be able to incorporate low-cost carriers because with offices in the vicinity of Cologne and Düsseldorf, these hubs are important to the company. Flights from the Rhineland are also frequently used by the company in general. Another specification was that the system be able to offer best buy rates and recommend alternatives. "Sometimes," says Wiltrud Strecker, "it is

better for our staff to fly from Düsseldorf than Cologne. The system needs to point out this option." It is also necessary for the company's travel guidelines to be displayed - "and all at a sensible price."

The travel manager found that all of the specifications were best met by cytric from i:FAO. And because the existing travel agency service company was not able to offer cytric, Computacenter selected Deutsche Reisebüro as its new partner. "Naturally, DER's service quality in particular was what convinced us most."

cytric was initially thoroughly tested from November to December 2004 by 20 selected "top travellers" from management and their assistants. Following encouraging results from this first test, the use of the tool was extended for four weeks to 50 business travellers at the Kerpen office. Roll-out to all Computacenter staff throughout Germany was implemented on 1 February 2005. Travel management allows the staff to choose how they use the system: all frequent travellers can either access the system themselves or arrange for bookings to be made by a travel assistant. In addition to online training, travel management has also published a cytric operating manual. Wiltrud Strecker is personally available to provide telephone support. She only receives "a modest number" of calls. In most cases, staff are uncertain whether they are really buying best buy fares. They suspect that even cheaper tickets are available in the websites of the providers themselves. Wiltrud Strecker can reassure these colleagues that the fares displayed by the central reservation system really are the cheapest on offer.

Thanks to the best buy function, Computacenter is already achieving real savings on flights. Hotels, hire cars and rail travel is currently only integrated within cytric via links. Computacenter is already seeing the benefits of online booking in its process costs: the company saves 70 per cent on online bookings compared to the traditional method. Wiltrud Strecker therefore wants to see a much higher rate of adoption than the present 45 per cent. She is aiming for 80 per cent. That should be achievable given the openness to technology of her colleagues.

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