

SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS TRAVEL FACES A NUMBER OF HURDLES



It is clearly visible at train stations and airports that business travelers are once again on their way to customers and events. Sustainability goals and concepts are thus coming up for practical testing in many places after a two-year travel break due to the pandemic. Many travel managers have set themselves ambitious goals. For example, a recent SAP-Concur study shows that half of business travel managers (46%) in Germany want to reduce their CO2 emissions this year.

The SAP-Concur study was conducted jointly with the market research institute iResearch among 700 business travel decision-makers from the UK, France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Nordics and Benelux.

The study shows that companies have many hurdles to overcome and many screws to turn in order to improve their mobility-related carbon footprint - from budget to employee engagement to travel policies. The biggest hurdle, however, lies in the area of knowledge: almost half of those surveyed lack the tools to make the impact of business travel on the environment visible. The problem is that if you don't know your biggest emissions drivers, you can't target these CO2 sources. Now is the time to implement the appropriate solutions for sustainable business travel. The biggest hurdles lie in very different areas and functions within the company.

Lack of Budget: Cutbacks as a Result of the Pandemic

Two out of three travel managers (64%) say their budget for business travel programs has been cut as a result of the pandemic. It's not surprising, therefore, that lack of budget is most often cited as a hurdle to achieving more sustainable business travel programs (43%). In contrast, given the high level of sustainability ambition, it is surprising that respondents invest an average of only one-sixth (14%) of their budgets in sustainable business travel programs. This reveals a gap between the high ambitions and actual practice.

Lack of Support: Employees Still Need to Be Convinced

41% of those responsible for business travel see a problem in convincing their employees. At least a third of the workforce (35%) is convinced on average by the concept of sustainable business travel. For the majority, however, there is still more or less a need for convincing. This is important insofar as the traveling employees can have a significant influence on the CO2 footprint of their employer with their decisions - for sustainable means of transport and accommodations or through active compensation. Here, travel managers have a responsibility to point employees to the most sustainable options throughout the booking and travel process and to demonstrate the contribution they can make.

Lack of Tools: Impact of Business Travel on the Environment Largely Unknown

While a lack of budget and employee commitment is seen as a common hurdle, but by no means the biggest one, the situation is more critical when it comes to the use of tools: 39% of business travel managers rate the lack of professional solutions that can make the impact of business travel on the environment visible as a hurdle on the way to improving their carbon footprint - and even one fifth

(21%) as the biggest hurdle. About half (45%) of respondents say their company already has a travel & expense solution in place. Just as many (46%) have more or less concrete plans to introduce such an IT solution. The requirements for this are high: From reporting to CO2 compensation, from communication and training support to consulting. However, a third of respondents (31%) see the greatest value of a tool in a comprehensive CSR dashboard. Another major benefit for some is reporting (18%), which can be easily achieved with a smart T&E solution.

Current Travel Policies: Not Yet Green and Flexible Enough

In many places, current travel policies still stand in the way of green business travel (39%). There is a need to catch up in this area. After all, with the right travel policies in place, business travel managers are literally taking their sustainability goals and concepts on the road. A lack of flexibility and adaptability of policies is a major hurdle on the road to sustainable business travel for one-third of travel managers - and the biggest hurdle for 17%. One-fifth of respondents (18%) have fully implemented sustainable travel policies. However, most of them are still in the process of adapting: about half of the respondents (52%) partially consider sustainability aspects in their travel policies - but there is still room for improvement. 28% are still in the planning phase.

Lack of Knowledge: Employees Know Too Little about Sustainability

Although 99% of companies offer training on sustainability topics and these are largely rated as good or exceptionally good (63%), almost one in three travel managers (29%) cite a lack of knowledge and training as an obstacle to sustainability. **Consequently, more information and more training on sustainability topics are needed to train travel managers and employees to become true sustainability ambassadors.**

Companies need to empower rather than patronize. Only well-informed employees can actively support sustainability goals. To do this, they - just like travel managers - need to know the facts and figures. They need to know where their company stands on the path to achieving its goals, what influences their behavior has, and in which areas they can improve. To do this, business travel data must be consistently recorded, collated and evaluated in a system.

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