# The world
## *at your fingertips*

*TravelLinck has been described as a dedicated, new way of travel management; an institution that achieves greater transparency, control, and cost savings. As testimony to their brilliant solution, ArcelorMittal, Blue Label Telecoms, Nedbank, Old Mutual and Primedia, among others, have partnered with TravelLinck. Business Traveller Africa explores this exciting travel management concept.*

Roderick Ross, CEO of TravelLinck, explains how TravelLinck grew by analysing inefficiencies in the end-to-end manner in which corporate travel was managed. Old Mutual, a key protagonist, identified two key problems as being the lack of transparent data and the inability to pro-actively manage costs.

TravelLinck was mandated by Old Mutual in 2006 to develop a dedicated Internet based Travel Management Portal giving direct access to preferred suppliers, with payment tracking and reconciliation functionality. The goal was to streamline their travel process, cut costs and increase transparency. In response to these requirements, TravelLinck looked to global practices within the corporate travel industry as well as best-practice technology methodologies to build a solution from the ground up. TravelLinck focused on open-standards and open-source components, to enable them to provide a highly scalable architecture that can be deployed anywhere in Africa.

### Guaranteeing a support system

Ross expresses that no corporate that is serious about cost savings is able to achieve the targets without changing one or more of the following: the frequency and destination of travel, the suppliers being booked, the classes being booked, the discipline around requesting travel in advance, and the amount of time that travel arrangements are changed after they have been paid for.

TravelLinck's technology certainly assists with each of these aspects, but they don't underestimate the need to use technology in conjunction with a well thought out change management strategy to implement a revised policy and achieve the goals set out.

With that in mind, TravelLinck works with their clients to obtain executive support at an early stage. They then implement a phased roll-out, combined with internal communication to enforce the revised travel policy, at various levels across the organisation. The need for cost containment should be communicated at an executive level, because highlighting the benefits of the big picture helps to overcome any resistance to change.

Some initially criticized the TravelLinck model saying that it cuts out the personal experience of dealing with a travel agent; however Ross reveals that this is an interesting misconception. He maintains that TravelLinck works very closely with leading agencies to improve the end-to-end offering to the corporate. As noted by Ross, "the client decides what they want to do themselves and what they want the agency to do. TravelLinck acts as the bridge to allow all parties to function efficiently. We certainly don't remove the personal experience. In fact, by freeing up the agency to focus on value added services they elevate consultants to have more time for when their personal touch is required".

### What are the benefits?

Ross explains how TravelLinck offers benefits which are far reaching. TravelLinck provides its' **Corporate Clients** with independence, control, cost savings, and significant productivity improvements. **Suppliers** in the value chain enjoy the benefits of an ecosystem in which buyers and suppliers can interact efficiently. TravelLinck links buyers to suppliers through a range of mechanisms including directory listing, direct integration, integration via content integrators and integration via Global Distribution Systems. Suppliers are able to achieve higher margins, reduced distribution costs, rapid settlement and the ability to win new business without needing to train corporate and agency users in the use of their proprietary reservation systems.

TravelLinck enables **TMC's** to meet the needs of their clients, by simplifying the booking, payment and reconciliation processes. TravelLinck's real-time pre-trip reporting improves internal agency management and can also be passed on as a value-added service to customers, while their innovative payment and reconciliation technologies further streamline admin processes.

Finally, the **Banks** (card issuing companies) receive the benefit of comprehensive data which they provide on their card statements. Their end-to-end reconciliation links order number to budget centre as well as payment transactional data and adds significant value to corporate and agency payment processors and financial officers.

### Why are people choosing TravelLinck?

Ross explains that TravelLinck has a number of key differentiating points. The TravelLinck model is essentially **Pay-As-You-Go.** There is a small implementation fee to configure the corporate client, link them to the suppliers at their preferred rates, and load traveller profiles. They also make sure the agency hook-up is perfected during this stage. Thereafter clients pay on a transaction fee basis. If they make no bookings, no fees are due.

TravelLinck is **modularised**; the system has been designed around a number of key modules which can be used independently or as a completely integrated system. For example the Requisition and Authorisation module can be used independently and even hosted at a client's site if they so desire.

TravelLinck's **stand-alone quoting module** can be used by the corporate or agency to quickly generate a fully branded quote, based on the options they select. This saves everyone time and avoids unnecessary false bookings to supplier. The quoting module handles arbitrarily complex domestic flights (e.g. 10 legs if you wish), allowing the user to **mix and match between airlines** with private and public fares displayed for all airlines.

When a non-skilled user makes a booking, all the necessary agency commands to track corporate rates and so forth are automated behind the scenes, leading to **robotic quality control.** Furthermore, the payment of multiple airlines happens simultaneously, with **robotic ticketing** leading to a turn-around time of a few seconds.

Ross goes on to note that TravelLinck's "Spring release" allows customers to fully **brand their own experience** in TravelLinck. This allows agencies and corporates' to control and enhance the user experience. Furthermore TravelLinck has added **much richer content**, particularly in the accommodation space, to increase their regional and global reach.

TravelLinck's **Online Business Intelligence** module provides for rich visual analysis and enables the TMC to provide far more strategic insights to the corporate and focus on advisory services. This empowers organisations to fully understand the nature of their travel, as well as its impact on the environment, through the use of TravelLinck's **built-in carbon emissions calculator.**

TravelLinck is not owned by any Travel agency or GDS, and is the only South African solution with **multi GDS capability.** Agencies that work on multiple GDS systems thus have the flexibility to better service their clients, and it gives the corporate more choice of suitable agencies and greater independence.

There are some challenges in South Africa with such a progressive system. Importantly, South Africa has poor bandwidth when compared to overseas. TravelLinck have turned this into a tremendous opportunity, by developing **an exceptionally fast, local solution** that can work in areas of very poor bandwidth. This gives them an advantage over overseas solutions that have not been optimized for the local market. TravelLinck is exploring other opportunities in Africa, where they can further leverage this advantage.

Payment mechanisms in South Africa are different to overseas, with a large amount of travel being booked on Lodge Cards, rather than corporate cards. The **reconciliation** of such card statements is challenging when you don't have a system in place. TravelLinck's **automated matching of lodge card statements** saves agencies, and corporate clients, further time and makes life much easier when it comes to **allocating costs to cost centres.**

### How has the market responded?

Ross proudly expresses that the response to TravelLinck has been excellent. The global recession has meant that travel, being the 2nd largest controllable spend, has been analysed as an avenue for reducing costs. Ross comments that they find that corporates with a travel budget of R1 million can be as passionate, and in need of a solution, as clients with one hundred times that spend. In the last few months TravelLinck has added twenty new clients and the current implementation pipeline is keeping their team of specialists busy.

Ross maintains that the global trend is certainly towards technology facilitating travel and doesn't see South Africa bucking the trend. The smart TMCs are embracing technology and learning how to use it to improve their margins and free up their consultants to focus on value added services.

TravelLinck was built from scratch to meet the needs of the South African and African marketplace. The end goal of streamlining travel processes has always been at the heart of the solution and it has resulted in a focused technology solution designed for the African market. ■

- Built from scratch to meet the needs of the African marketplace
- Ability to **rebrand**/customise the entire offering with the Corporate or Travel Agency branding
- Cost Savings and **policy enforcement**
- Transparent pricing, inexpensive, **no expensive license fees**
- **Easy to use application** with visual guilt
- **Very fast**, no dial up to offshore site
- Local development and **integration capabilities**
- **Real-time reporting** to manage travel pro-actively
- **Detailed MIS** include $CO_2$ impact per domestic flight
- Integrated offering from **Request through to Reconciliation**
- **Modularised**, can use Requisition and Authorisation independently
- Accurate reporting and **automated recon of Lodge Card** to avoid interest charges
- **Transparency – rapidly search for best deals, corporate and private**
- **Direct access** to preferred suppliers – flights, car, hotels
- Streamlining the payment process for B&B's
- **Own and control your data**
- Pay-As-You-Go model – Low cost of implementation
- Partner with approved Travel Agencies
- Not owned by any Travel agency or GDS, **totally independent**
- Powerful **online Business Intelligence Tool** for data mining and reporting on travel spend and behaviour.
- **Carbon calculator** built into the solution.
- **Auto ticketing** capability, no human error when ticketing flights!
- Stand alone **quotation facility.**
- Only solution with **multi GDS** capability.
- After hours service