



Assessing a Travel Program's 'GPA'

by Michèle McDonald

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Travel GPA does not mean “grade point average.” GPA stands for Great Professional Advice, but it does provide a “report card” that agencies and their corporate clients can use to assess their own performance and see how they compare with their peers in the complex world of corporate travel management.

Travel GPA provides real-time, in-depth policy and benchmarking analysis on corporate travel spending. The data is live and can be scored against internal goals or benchmarked against the Travel GPA database of more than 32,000 companies and totaling more than \$6 billion in expenditures.

It is a division of Prime Numbers Technology, a Medfield, Mass.-based company headed by Rock Blanco, a veteran of the travel agency community who has long been involved in the development of agency technology. He has served as the top technology executive at Garber Travel (now FCm Travel Solutions) and Atlas Travel.



Rock Blanco

Travel GPA aims to provide more meaningful data to agencies and their clients than what typical reports currently provide. “In the 21st century, what does ‘Top 5 airlines’ mean to anyone?” Blanco asked. “What is an ‘average fare’? There’s a need for better information to make decisions, and everything could use an upgrade.”

Rather than conjure up dazzling metrics that in the end have little practical use, Blanco took a different approach that is designed to tell the client “how good you look in the mirror.” The client establishes specific goals of a travel management program – key performance indicators such as advance purchases, lowest-fare acceptance and hotel tier levels, for example – and Travel GPA determines “how you’re graded on that.”

Blanco has collected a mass of data from travel agencies, GDSs, third-party reporting systems, expense-reporting systems and other sources to provide benchmarks for agency performance.

After an agency submits data, it is scored on a scale of 1.0 to 4.0. “I’ve tried to mimic the concept of a credit bureau report,” Blanco said.

Travel GPA then “literally produces a business plan in words that people can understand.”

The idea is to lower the client’s cost of doing business, a task made more complex in recent times with the airline craze for ancillary revenues. “Life changes once the traveler hits the road, and credit card data don’t always give you a breakdown of ancillaries,” Blanco said. Yet many companies still do not use an automated expense reporting system that would give them a clearer picture of their “cost of doing

business.”

Whether Travel GPA is financially feasible for an agency does not depend on the agency’s size, Blanco said. Rather, if an agency has at least one client that spends \$100,000 a year, the program can make sense.

The great mass of clients is the midmarket accounts in the range of \$1 million to \$5 million, Blanco said, yet they are the companies that are hit the hardest when it comes to travel. “They leave a lot of money on the table because they are in between,” he said.