

Blanco Adds 92 TMC Users, Sets Price for Benchmarking

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Industry tech maven Rock Blanco late last year launched a new firm as use of his Travel GPA benchmarking product began to ramp up. Blanco unveiled the system in July, and has set pricing at a competitive \$500 setup fee and \$2,500 annual license for unlimited data and report cards.

Now president of Prime Numbers Technology, Blanco said during an interview here yesterday that 92 travel management companies are using the data and ratings tool. Its benchmarking database houses booking and other information on more than \$4 billion worth of annual travel spend, the firm announced.

Blanco acknowledged that travel industry benchmarking is not exactly an untapped market, with Prism Group, Runzheimer International, Topaz International, and TRX--as well as associations, consulting firms and TMCs themselves--providing various related services. But Blanco said his product's differentiation comes in the Travel GPA grading scheme, price and speed to market with new features.

Currently available only to users of Cornerstone Information Systems' iBank reporting tool, Travel GPA allows TMCs and their clients to measure performance against contract goals set with vendors and benchmark against like companies, by geography, size, industry sector and other factors. The benchmark analysis grades the effectiveness of various aspects of users' travel management programs, including "air, car rental and hotel average cost expenditures, and top airline markets and carrier comparisons." The system's newest metrics include "number of preferred contracts by category of air, car and hotel; contract compliance measurement; and a carbon footprint gauge based upon number or airline miles flown."

Blanco said he had no plans to create the carbon tool when his technology was in beta test last summer. But having told TMCs it was something he could do, client demand drove Blanco to partner with Burlington, Vt.-based Native Energy for emissions data that helps build footprint reports and allows buyers to monitor the ecological impact of their organizations' travel--down to the traveler. Clients can also use private-labeled Web pages populated by their Travel GPA report cards, as well as tools with which to buy carbon offsets from Native Energy.

Another planned add-on is automated, post-trip traveler surveys specifically tied to the products and services encountered on the traveler's latest trip.

Blanco said he has been criticized (sarcastically) for charging too little, but the less modest elements of Blanco's vision have him seeking industry standard status: "In RFPs, you'll see 'What's your Travel GPA?'"

~ Jay Campbell

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