

Major Airline Websites Deliver Corporate-Level Travel Tools to Small Business Travelers

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ASBTA Survey Finds Southwest Airlines and American Airlines' Sites Rank Highest, but None Fully Meet Needs of Small Business Travelers

A recently completed survey indicates that small business travelers rely on major airline websites, but would like the airlines to improve those sites to better meet their specific needs and expectations, reported the American Small Business Travelers Alliance (ASBTA). ASBTA is a national, non-profit alliance that provides valuable services and functions focused specifically on the travel needs and interests of small business owners.

The online survey - the third conducted by ASBTA this year - polled both members and non-members on a number of travel-related issues, including their use of airline websites. Results reveal that although 83 percent of the small business travelers surveyed indicated they use airline websites to book flights, they rated those sites as just 'satisfactory' or 'need improvement.'

'The Internet has done much to level the playing field for small businesses, and airline websites have certainly made it easier for small business travelers to access information and a level of service previously available only to larger businesses,' said Chet Gray, ASBTA vice president. 'And while the results of this survey indicate small business travelers widely use airline websites, opportunities remain for more tailored service on these sites. We consider this a call to the airline industry to look at this important segment of business traveler more closely than even we thought they had been doing.'

The survey asked small business travelers to rank several major airlines' websites as 'Best,' 'Very Good,' 'Satisfactory,' or 'Needs Improvement.' Southwest Airlines and American Airlines were given the highest ratings of 'Best' and 'Very Good' by respondents. The two airlines tied at 12 percent in the 'Best' category, while Southwest received a slightly higher rating of 22 percent in the 'Very Good' category, compared to American's 21 percent. All other airlines included in the survey, including AirTran, Continental, Delta, Jet Blue and United, trailed behind with ratings of between two and four percent in the 'Best' category and between 8 and 17 percent in the 'Very Good' category.

The survey also identified that nearly half (48 percent) of respondents indicated they also book flights by calling the airline directly, which may be a further indication that airline websites are not sufficiently meeting the needs of small business travelers. On the other hand, the survey reveals that more small business travelers are turning to airline websites instead of other methods. Results show that 56 percent of respondents use travel websites to make flight arrangements, while 47 percent use a travel agent, compared to 83 percent using airlines' websites.

Finally, a recent trend that may eventually help to improve both airline websites and the satisfaction of small business travelers using them is the increasing use of Meta search engines. The survey indicated that nine percent of respondents utilize Meta search engines to book flights. Although the amount is small by comparison to the other methods, the fact that it registered at all indicates growing acceptance of this time- and cost-saving medium. (In a press release dated November 9, 2005, ASBTA highlighted the benefits of Meta search engines for both small business travelers and the airlines as the latter group begin to embrace the technology.)

'The Internet is an important new tool for the airline industry,' said Gray. 'While some airlines may have better sites than others, there's definitely room for improvement.'

'If ASBTA were to give advice to the airlines based on these survey results it would be to recognize that although small business travelers are indeed 'business travelers,' it's a mistake to think that they are just like every other business traveler out there.'

About ASBTA

ASBTA is dedicated to educating the small business traveler and promoting the travel industry at large. The American Small Business Travelers Alliance (ASBTA) is a national, non-profit organization serving small business travelers by providing information to enhance your travel experience. If you're a small business owner and would like a free membership visit our site at www.asbta.com or by phone at 469-648-0190. The overall survey results will be posted on the ASBTA website.

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