T&T To Launch Subsidiary Focused On Data Aggregation, Visualization

Travel and Transport is making a big bet on "big data" by forming a stand-alone subsidiary that will provide data consolidation, aggregation and visualization tools for clients and nonclients alike. The emerging platform counts Travel and Transport client Allstate as an early adopter.

Meanwhile, Carlson Wagonlit Travel is rolling out a data analysis suite, which its executives said paves the way to integrate card, expense and other data for clients.

During the Innovate conference hosted last month by The BTN Group, of which *The Beat* is a part, Travel and Transport general manager of strategic initiatives Brian Beard lifted the veil on what he called a «subsidiary company» that will be wholly owned by Travel and Transport.

"T&T will be my sugar daddy," he joked during an on-stage demonstration. "We are offering this to the whole industry, all corporations."

Beard said the big idea is to help corporations analyze travel programs, assess out-of-program spend, bridge the data disadvantage buyers face when negotiating with suppliers, predict spending and capture total trip details, including, for example, folio-level hotel data and airline ancillary spend.

Travel and Transport has partnered with several data firms to power its system and will pull data from various sources, including travel management company back- and midoffice systems, credit cards, expense reporting systems, HR tools, industry benchmark information, social media and public data, such as stock market or weather information.

"We're in alpha stage with two customers," Beard said last month, noting plans to go live with the Web-based software-as-a-service platform by the end of the year.

Allstate worked with Travel and Transport on its own data-transformation project, which kicked off with refor-matted travel management dashboards. "We use just travel data right now," Allstate director of travel management services Duane Goucher said last week. "In the coming weeks, Allstate is going to bring in non-T&E data," such as expense and credit card information, which will lend line-item detail. The company is migrating its expense platform "from a 1990s Fisher-Price platform to a complete cloud solution," said Goucher. That will lay the pipes to expose richer expense data into T&T's new platform.

Allstate will look to layer in other information, such as weather data, travel industry benchmarks and social media data like TripAdvisor reviews. Goucher expected Allstate's iteration of the Travel and Transport system to be configured and running at full speed as soon as the first quarter of 2016.

Goucher said the system should lend deeper insight into the company's travel spend while supporting policy compliance, budget setting, senior management visibility and supplier negotiations. "When I sit down with United Airlines and they say, 'You gave us $11 million last year,' I can say, 'No, we gave you $14 million because you forgot that we bought $700,000 worth of cocktails and $300,000 worth of Wi-Fi,'" said Goucher.

Travel and Transport has referred to the project internally as the "big data initiative," and the company plans to finalize the name of the subsidiary this month.

As for the technology and partnerships behind the system, Travel and Transport uses Microsoft SQL Server as its primary data warehouse and will use tools from Information Builders, an enterprise business intelligence software provider. For what Beard called the "visualization layer," Travel and Transport is using Information Builders' Info Discovery and is experimenting with data visualization tools from Tableau Software. "In addition, we have a couple tools used in the background for administration and security of our data warehouse," noted Beard.

"The strategy is taking the best-of-breed components," said Beard. "We combined seven or eight of the best tools on the market and integrated those together. That gives us flexibility and keeps our costs way down."

Beard did not disclose price points, but during the Innovate conference, he said he expected "multiple tiers." He expected to charge clients a flat fee for unlimited users, setting his sights set on what he called a "low-cost" offering.

Travel and Transport is not alone in mining an opportunity in data management.

Following a 30-client pilot, Carlson Wagonlit Travel is rolling out a data reporting and benchmarking tool, AnalytiQs, which provides a "near-real-time data dashboard" premised on global coverage, a "user-friendly interface" and "actionable" data, according to the company.

The tool centers around 40 key performance indicators, for which clients can drill down and benchmark against other CWT clients. The tool also includes a "community" tab, something of a social network that lets travel mangers interact with other CWT clients.

For now, agency booking data feed CWT's tool, but "down the road," CWT plans to bring in "third-party, non-CWT data, as well," said CWT senior vice president of global marketing Nick Vournakis.

He said, "We can consolidate data from other agencies, if necessary. We will be able to consolidate credit card data; we'll be able to consolidate expense report data. For us, we know that's one of the biggest challenges that any travel manager has today. They want one single source, end-to-end view of their entire T&E expenditure. Our vision is to be that single source."

While the core AnalytiQs tool is standard for CWT clients, "we do see that as a valued-added component to an end-to-end offer," Vournakis said about aggregating non-CWT data.

CWT sees business intelligence as a proprietary, self-built opportunity. "We want to be in a position to own, guide and direct how we develop on that particular aspect," he said.

There are signs that corporate travel buyers struggle with data management, which was reported as a major time suck for 57 percent of the 237 North American travel managers surveyed by the Global Business Travel Association and Sabre this year.

Agencies have long provided data analysis and business intelligence tools, though it's not clear how many more want to step into the role of nontravel data aggregation. FCm's ClientBank Cloud, for example, is premised in part on incorporating nontravel data.

Meanwhile, BCD Travel finished migrating clients to its upgraded Decision Source system last year, phasing out «multiple legacy tools.»

Even so, BCD is not yet sold on expanding its role in aggregating nontravel data. "Long-term, do we need to bring in card data and other things? That's still up for discussion," said BCD Travel president and CEO John Snyder during The Beat Live conference in Arlington, Va., last month. "Right now, we are focusing on having a very comprehensive data set for travel information."