

TRAVEL COLLECTIONS

ASBTA: Small Business Travelers Increase Productivity With Travel Industry Technology Advances

19 March 2005

Whereas travel time once equated to significant downtime for small business executives, all that has changed with an increasingly "wired" travel industry, reports the American Small Business Travelers Alliance (ASBTA). ASBTA is a national alliance that provides valuable services and functions focused specifically on the travel needs and interests of small business owners.

Today, airlines, airports, hotels, car rental companies and even restaurants are implementing technological advances and adding convenience services geared toward increasing productivity for small business travelers.

"The fact that a business traveler can do almost everything while traveling that he or she can do in the office is a major step in increasing business productivity," said Chet Gray, ASBTA vice president of Sales and Marketing. "It's also further proof that the travel industry is really making strides in understanding the needs of small business travelers."

The advances start at airports, where major airlines and the airports themselves are making it possible for business travelers to effectively utilize their wait with greatly improved and easily accessible facilities. For instance, American Airlines enables businesses to save valuable time and travel expense by planning meetings right at the airport, utilizing state-of-the-art meeting facilities at Admirals Club Executive Centers(R) in Chicago O'Hare, Dallas/Fort Worth, New York LaGuardia and San Francisco. Executive Centers are fully equipped with everything from computer data ports and speakerphones to slide and data projectors, and customers have access to other necessary office equipment, such as paper shredders and copiers. Complimentary tea and coffee are also available, and full-service catering is available on request. Most importantly for budget-conscious businesses, Admirals Club membership is not required to use the service. (For more information, visit <http://www.aa.com/content/travelInformation/airportAmenities/admiralsClubArticles/meetingAccommodations.jhtml>.)

Airports are increasingly adding Wi-Fi hotspots that allow travelers with wireless enabled laptops and, in some cases, appropriate Wi-Fi subscription service, to wirelessly connect to the Internet. At Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport, for example, at least five wireless access providers offer service to all of the airport's terminals and the airport car rental facility. Airports around the country and the world are adding similar services every day, as are train stations, restaurants and even gas stations. In fact, Gartner forecasts that the number of worldwide hotspots will reach 151,768 this year, compared to a mere 1,214 in 2001.

"It's not difficult to see how these new options at airports can turn long layovers into productive work and meeting time," said Gray. "Handling conferences at the airport instead of at off-site locations could even shorten trips for many business travelers, ultimately saving companies money on accommodation and transportation expenses."

For those trips that do require accommodations, most middle-range hotels now offer, or are rolling out, high-speed Internet and Wi-Fi at little or no extra cost. Best Western offers customers free high-speed Internet access and Wi-Fi at all of its 2,300 locations, and Hilton expects to equip all 2,400 locations with public Wi-Fi this year. Holiday Inn, allows travelers to book their rooms wirelessly using almost any wireless device, including PDAs and BlackBerrys.

Car rental companies are also utilizing wireless technology to make it easier for small business travelers to get where they need to go faster and easier. While many companies offer drivers optional onboard satellite navigation systems to help them get where they want to go in the car, companies like Avis are utilizing handheld devices that can be used both inside and outside of the car. For a minimal daily fee at select airports, the one-of-a-kind Avis Assist program provides customers with point-by-point text directions and voice prompts, real-time traffic reports, and one-touch speed dial to emergency numbers and the Avis call center, all through a handheld wireless device. (Visit www.avis.com/AvisWeb/JSP/US/en/deals/us_assist.jsp for program details.)

"The best part is that this is only the beginning. The travel industry has really just begun to implement the technology and services that will make business travel easier and more efficient than ever before," said Gray.

About ASBTA:

The American Small Business Travelers Alliance (ASBTA) is a national organization serving small business travelers by providing information regarding resources, services, savings on air fares, car rentals, and accommodations, as well as and technology designed to improve and enhance the travel experience. If you're a small business owner and want to learn more, visit our site and register (free until December 1, 2005) at www.asbta.com. Give us a call or e-mail us at info@asbta.com if you have questions or want to share ideas about what small business travelers really need and how ASBTA can serve you effectively. Call us at 469-648-0190.

http://www.travelcollections.com/asbta_small_business_travelers_increase_productivity_with_travel_industry_technology_ed.aspx