

A large red number '25' is positioned on the left side of the banner. To its right, the text 'Business Travel News, since 1984' is written in a smaller white font. Below this, the word 'BTNonline' is written in a large, bold, white sans-serif font. To the right of 'BTNonline', the phrase 'Corporate Travel Intelligence' is written in a smaller white font. The entire banner has a dark blue background with a subtle gradient and rounded corners.

Business Travel News, since 1984

BTNonline Corporate Travel Intelligence

BTN Research: Cos. Seek More Self-Booking Content, Capabilities

By Seth Harris

SEPTEMBER 22, 2008 -- Amid this summer's flurry of online booking tool integrations with expense tool providers and meetings management technology, links to third-party content and launches of mobile service, most travel buyers said their primary self-booking tools provide the functionality their company needs, according to original BTN research based on a survey of 196 respondents.

Some respondents noted the need for more inventory and functionality, like the capability to process ticket changes or cancellations online and add air segments to a previously booked hotel reservation, and real-time hotel availability.

For example, Northrop Grumman travel program administrator Rene Cruz said the availability in such tools of corporate negotiated rates at extended stay properties would ease the challenge of managing long-term hotel stays and increase savings. "The company may have a long-term agreement, but the travel population can't see that," he said.

While larger, more ambitious projects are underway, including adapting point-of-sale interfaces to handle unbundled airfares, baggage fees and additional services ([BTNonline, July 21](#)), online booking tool providers still are developing core service capabilities to keep adoption levels rising and save clients money by automating more processes.

"The battle of the feature sets seems to have sorted out a little bit," said travel management consultant **Tom Wilkinson**, president of TRW Travel Consulting. "People know how to use these tools, and it's easier to make reservations online than on the phone. We really have reached an era when online booking for most corporations and most trips is the default."

Unhandled exception errors—error messages—are at record lows, which keeps users from calling an agent or starting the booking process over, said ResX Technologies president Shane Hammond. Now, tool providers are enhancing user interfaces, increasing speed and adding more supplier content, including low-cost carriers outside of the United States and non-GDS hotel inventory in Europe and Asia, especially China.

"No one has really cracked that code," Hammond said. "The things we don't talk about today as massive developments were yesterday's big news. Every time we had a release or GetThere or Cliqbook had a release, we would be talking about all these sexy new features and components and the corporate buyers were just waiting. Now everybody has a pretty good product and they just keep improving."

One recent GetThere enhancement that helped Northrop drive travelers to preferred hotels is the launch of informational text fields, mapping features and hotel amenity details, instead of "not relevant" GDS-populated information about a hotel's renovation efforts, Cruz said. "My travelers need to know where you are located in relation to the local Air Force base or Northrop Grumman office," he said.

Enabling technology that can handle more complex itineraries, ticket changes or new content could push adoption past previously impassable boundaries, but without being able to handle more complex air, car and hotel bookings, "you're not really going to increase adoption any further," said Chad Schneider, Carlson Wagonlit Travel product manager of online booking partners in North America.

"Adoption levels are getting to the point where they are somewhat saturated in numbers on Horizon, where we have 74 percent overall adoption," Schneider said. The remaining 26 percent makes up international, VIPs who just aren't going to book it online or those that call in because it's complex."