

# NBTA Technology Committee Introduces First Ever Online Booking Tool RFP



helping corporations optimize their management of travel and expenses.

## Two-Pronged Approach

The end result is an RFP with two distinct components. "In addition to an RFP, it's also a sourcing guide," says Wilkinson, who is now a member of the Technology Committee. "It provides industry context, what OBTA's are, the issues surrounding them, their value, and an

exploration of all the important considerations." As an example, Wilkinson calls out the part of the introduction that discusses what kinds of content an OBTA can and cannot access, as well as strategies for the corporate travel manager to evaluate and ensure all necessary content is available through the chosen OBTA.

The RFP itself was designed to be as comprehensive as possible for the North American travel manager. "It's a large document and not intended for a travel manager to simply take the whole thing and slap their name on it," emphasizes Rita Visser, chair of the Technology Committee and senior manager, global travel and air procurement lead for Oracle Corporation. "It's important for the user to eliminate any of the questions that don't apply to them so they can get useful and targeted responses." The Committee already has plans to further expand and refine the RFP. "When we first rolled it out, it was intended for North American applications, but we had such interest in the global aspects that we included much of that as well," says Visser. "In keeping with NBTA's mission to be a global association, as the tool evolves, it will become even more global in scope." For a copy of the Online Booking Tool RFP, go to [www.nbta.org/obtrfp](http://www.nbta.org/obtrfp). ■

## Inside the RFP

The OBTA RFP includes 19 different categories of questions, ranging from general booking capabilities and special booking issues to profile management, security and privacy, and integration with other systems. Following is just a sampling of the hundreds of questions included in the RFP.

- How does the system prioritize fare and rate displays, i.e., does it show either the lowest available fares and rates, or those with preferred (negotiated) discounts? Can the corporation configure that display bias and, if so, can the bias be different for trips to different destinations?
- How does your system manage a transaction when the traveler books inventory from a source outside the GDS?
  - Are segments created in the GDS that might increase my costs?
  - Is there a Super-PNR technology for non-GDS content included/offered?
  - If so, is there an accounting interface record (like a Sabre MIR) created to support reporting and workflow?
- Does your system allow a traveler to book only hotel room without an accompanying air segment? If an air segment has been booked, will the OBTA allow a traveler to add a hotel to that segment without an additional booking fee? Can travelers book a hotel online and then add a flight segment to that reservation?
- Does your system synchronize traveler profiles with a GDS? Is it usually configured to house the 'master' profile? If so, are changes in GDS profiles reflected automatically in the OBTA? Are changes in OBTA profiles reflected automatically in the GDS?
- What services other than airline, hotel, rail and car rental can be purchased through the OBTA? Please document the value and benefits of procuring these services online, and provide references of customers that can describe the pros and cons of such services.
  - Packing and Shipping
  - Parking
  - Dining
  - Limousines/car and driver
  - Audio conferencing (teleconferencing); web conferencing

**W**hen NBTA's Technology Committee introduced the Online Booking Tool (OBTA) RFP at the NBTA International Convention & Exposition this summer, the educational session where it was presented was a sell-out. "The RFP drew huge interest from the attendees," says Theo Szymanski, vice chair of the Technology Committee and director of sales for Trondent Development Corp.

That wasn't a great surprise to the committee, which had identified a real need in the marketplace for such an RFP. "There was a lot of information in the marketplace," says Szymanski, "but no broad document for what to look for when considering the purchase of an online booking tool. As far as we know, this RFP is the first of its kind."

The committee drew on expertise from multiple sources to gather all the necessary elements for the RFP, starting with the members of the committee, a cross-section of corporate travel managers and suppliers. Then they reached out to representatives from all the major online booking tools and travel management companies. To help pull it all together, they enlisted the services of leading travel technology consultant Tom Wilkinson, president of Pennington, New Jersey-based TRW Travel & Expense Management, a company that specializes in