Grainger: Streamlining Travel Planning and Expense Reporting

Partner

GetThere

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Company
W. W. Grainger Inc.

Industry
Wholesale distribution – industrial products

Products and Services
Motors, lighting, material handling, fasteners, plumbing, tools, safety supplies, and much more

Web Site
www.grainger.com

SAP® Solutions
SAP® Travel Management application

Partner
GetThere (www.getthere.com)

Why make your people enter their travel information once when planning their trips and again when filling out their expense reports? This just wastes time and invites errors. Industrial parts distributor W. W. Grainger Inc. found a solution by leveraging the integration between the SAP® Travel Management application and the GetThere online booking tool. Now employees are booking online more often, **saving time on expense reports,** and calling their travel agent for help less frequently.

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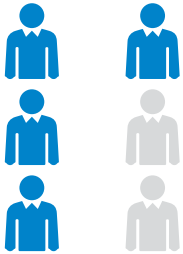
Providing industrial products to millions of customers

W. W. Grainger Inc. is a business-to-business distributor of products and services for maintaining, repairing, and operating facilities of many kinds. Millions of customers worldwide rely on Grainger for products like pumps, motors, tools, supplies, and much more. These customers represent industries such as healthcare, manufacturing, government, and hospitality. More than 3,000 manufacturers supply Grainger's distribution centers with over 1 million products. The Lake Forest, Illinois, firm employs 18,500 people and achieves annual revenues of US$7.2 billion.

Grainger uses SAP software extensively in running its business, including the SAP NetWeaver® Portal component and the finance and human capital management functionality of the SAP ERP application. The company also uses the expense reporting functionality of SAP Travel Management, which business travelers employ for composing and filing their expense reports, and the SAP Business Workflow tool, which management uses for approving these reports.

Until recently Grainger had a legacy system for online booking that was not integrated with the SAP software for expense reporting.



18,500

Employees

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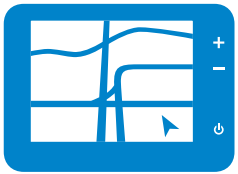
Integrating the entire travel software environment

The distribution business calls for extensive travel. Some 30% of Grainger's employees make trips regularly for sales, service, and business development purposes. Those travelers file a total of 65,000 expense reports a year. In the past, the information for every report had to be entered from scratch even though the trip information was already captured in the legacy booking tool. Always on the lookout for productivity improvement opportunities, Grainger's management saw how much the company could gain by automatically populating expense reports with data that the employee entered at booking time. The tens of thousands of hours that employees spent redundantly every year entering airfare, hotel, rental car, and other information could be rededicated to growing the business.

Grainger also wanted to provide management with visibility into employee travel arrangements without the managers having to call the firm's travel agent to provide that information. This visibility could only be achieved with an integrated travel support software landscape. Interfacing the legacy booking tool with SAP Travel Management was not an alternative.



30%

Grainger employees who travel regularly

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Automatically populating expense reports with travel data

Eager to gain the efficiency and visibility benefits of integrated travel software, Grainger approached SAP for a solution. SAP presented its partnership with GetThere, a subsidiary of a world leader in the travel marketplace, Sabre Holdings. "SAP explained that by adopting GetThere as our online booking tool, we could take advantage of the integration that the two companies have performed to automate the transfer of travel data from GetThere to SAP Travel Management," says Don Lien, business system analyst at Grainger. "Expense reports are automatically populated with the travel information that was entered during booking, saving substantial time for our busy travelers."

Grainger could have licensed GetThere directly from the company, but it opted instead to acquire a license from BCD Travel as part of the full service the agency provides.

"Since we already had the expense reporting functionality of SAP Travel Management and all the needed elements around it, there was no discussion about using any other solution."

Don Lien, Business System Analyst, W. W. Grainger Inc.

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Leveraging preintegration to expedite deployment

Since SAP and GetThere had already provided integration for their respective applications, the implementation was straightforward. Grainger's own IT staff performed the small amount of work needed to the SAP software. BCD Travel implemented the GetThere application and performed the conversion from the legacy package.

The project went smoothly and was completed on schedule. "I credit our successful outcome to a couple of factors," says Lien. "Everybody involved communicated extraordinarily well with one another, and we placed a heavy emphasis on training."

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Using the employee portal for easy access

Grainger's solution makes use of the employee portal the company developed using SAP NetWeaver Portal. Travelers use this portal to interact with GetThere first for booking their travel plans and later for filing their expense reports. BCD Travel systematically receives the booking information from GetThere through Sabre and then completes the reservations and issues tickets. After their trips, since the travel plans appear automatically in expense reporting, all employees have to do is add the ad hoc expenses they incurred on the trip such as meals and incidentals.

"Travel processes are much more efficient for both travelers and their managers."

Don Lien, Business System Analyst, W. W. Grainger Inc.

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Increasing travel software usage in every respect

As a result of the project, Granger's travelers can gain a head start on filling out their expense reports by having the software automatically enter their flight, hotel, rental car, and other information that they prearranged when booking their trips. In the solution's first few months, 20% of the bookings made in GetThere have been used to generate the subsequent expense reports, taking advantage of this time-saver, and the company is working to increase the adoption rate.

+20%

Automated expense reports filed

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Achieving more savings via analysis

Since many of Grainger's employees travel frequently, the company has a great deal to gain from taking advantage of its clout to command better prices from airlines, hotel chains, and rental car companies. Then it has even more to gain by driving its travelers to use the vendors that provide better discounts. Fraud and abuse detection provides additional savings opportunities. But all these potential benefits require collecting and analyzing a great deal of travel data.

"We haven't collected enough data to perform truly powerful analysis since the solution is so new here," says Lien. "But as we accumulate more data and as we increase the solution's adoption rate, we are optimistic that we will be able to gain substantial benefits from travel data analysis."

"We are very happy with our decisions. We did the right thing for the company by taking advantage of the tight integration between SAP Travel Management and GetThere."

Don Lien, Business System Analyst, W. W. Grainger Inc.

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