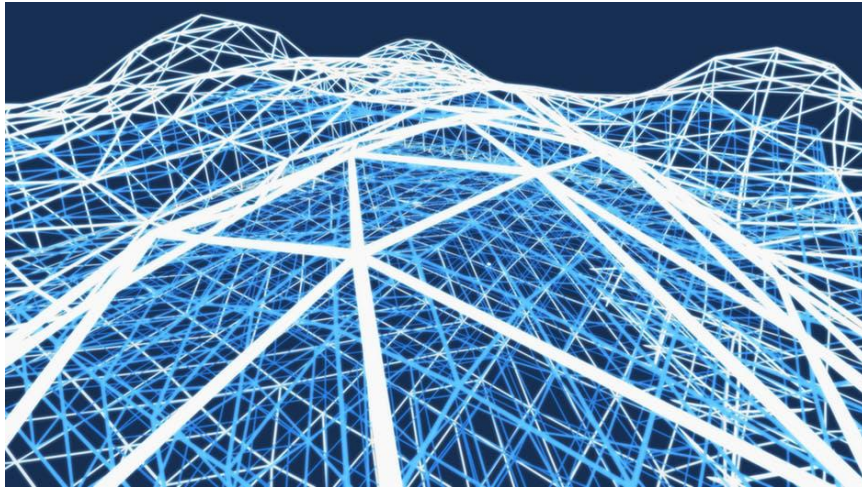


Artificial intelligence – 11 ways it could transform corporate travel



AI is set to improve and personalise every step of the trip process for business travellers while also handing greater control and data visibility to their employers.

A finance director of a pharmaceuticals company in Stockholm asks his lawyer in Copenhagen to come and see him about an important contract they are preparing together. The lawyer enters the meeting into her online calendar.

From the calendar entry, the lawyer's booking tool sees the meeting will last from 0900 to 1600 on Thursday. The tool also knows from her previous trips that the lawyer prefers to fly the night before meetings rather than take early flights. It also knows which airline she prefers. As for the hotel, the tool knows how much partners in the law firm are allowed to spend on accommodation in Stockholm, and which hotel most of them stay in when visiting that particular client.

Acting on all this information, the booking tool presents the lawyer with a list of two suitable flight options and three hotels, all within policy. The screen tells her: "This hotel is opposite the company you are visiting, and your colleagues have rated it 4.8 out of 5." The lawyer clicks once, and the flight and hotel reservations are confirmed.

Although the scenario above isn't yet fully a reality, almost all the elements of it exist today, and they are all examples of artificial intelligence in action. AI is poised to simplify life for business travellers while simultaneously giving more control and visibility to the employers who pay for their trips.

AI is the ability of computer systems to carry out tasks which previously required human intelligence. In the context of business travel, that particularly means analysing enormous sets of data and then recommending and taking action on the conclusions of the analysis. "There is now so much data available that it is too much for humans to be able to manage

Perspectives on Travel & Expenses

on their own,” says TravelpoolEurope managing director Søren Schødt. “AI is becoming necessary to process information and suggest or take meaningful action based on what has been learned. Development of this technology has the potential to make enormous improvements to the way we handle business travel.”

In the case of the lawyer’s trip, AI is combining the roles of personal assistant and travel agent, as well as acting as a policy enforcer. But there are many other tasks AI can perform, including services to help monitor and manage travel programmes. Here are just a few examples where AI is beginning to make a difference or has potential to do so in future.

Alerts for travel buyers

Spotting problems with your preferred hotel programme

AI can let you know if your travellers are regularly booking a non-preferred alternative to a preferred property in your programme. You can then investigate whether something is wrong with the preferred property (for example that customer service has deteriorated) or perhaps try to make the other hotel a preferred supplier.

Contract performance monitoring

AI can check bookings by your travellers and monitor rates in the marketplace to verify whether you have the most suitable suppliers in your programme.

What are travellers thinking?

If your travellers use a messaging platform like Slack or a social network like Yammer, you can use AI-powered sentiment analysis to evaluate what travellers think of the programme and detect any consistent subjects of complaint.

Steer travellers toward better booking decisions

One of the biggest potential benefits of AI is that it can personalise service for travellers. That means you can be more confident of offering them booking options they will like but which at the same time are compliant with travel policy. In effect, policy becomes invisible: there’s no longer a need for a written set of rules because the rules are built into the choices the travellers are offered.

Give travellers what they want

Tell travellers a particular hotel is in line with their personal preferences: “This hotel has a great Italian restaurant less than 200m away.”

Apply peer pressure

Show travellers what “normal” looks like: “The average rate booked by your colleagues in Munich is €158” or “73% of your colleagues book this hotel in Paris.”

Make advance booking smarter

AI-based tools can tell travellers how many days they should book a certain route in advance to secure the best fare.

Perspectives on Travel & Expenses

Set trip budgets

Based on previous trips by employees, the booking tool can tell the traveller how much their visit should cost – and propose flight, hotel and transfer options in line with that budget.

Give travellers personalised dashboards

Show them a personalised page every time they log into the travel portal, displaying data such as how much they have spent, their travel-related CO2 consumption, how often they book outside policy, and how their behaviour and spend compare with those of colleagues.

Reduce risk and fraud

The ability of AI to crunch data is helping manage both financial and personal risk related to business travel.

Warn travellers about disruption

AI can generate alerts about predicted disruptions for travellers, including bad weather or public health issues.

Manage disruptions

AI-powered chatbots can help rebook trips if thousands of travellers all need to change their plans at once.

Monitor expense claims

AI can look for patterns of suspicious behaviour, like employees whose claims are always just underneath the maximum permitted spend; or who consistently don't provide receipts.



The TravelpoolEurope perspective – AI is going to change the game

AI has the potential to become a valuable friend to corporate travel. And that's important, because it is already proving a formidable enemy: enabling hotels, airlines and others to send cleverly personalised offers to travellers that could tempt them away from the corporate travel programme. Now AI will help fight back with personalisation inside managed travel programmes aimed at keeping travellers compliant.

With opportunities to make data analysis much more powerful for buyers too, AI stands ready to take managed travel to a genuinely new level.