



Airfare Audits Demonstrate Agency Value, Traveler Compliance

For more than 30 years, Topaz International has been the industry leader in airfare auditing services for global and domestic travel programs. Each year, Topaz International reviews more than \$2 billion in airfares for clients of all sizes, helping to demonstrate traveler compliance and the value of using a travel management company.

"Our clients range in size from under \$1 million in annual travel volume to over \$200 million across a very broad spectrum of industries," said Michele Simon, director of sales and client services for Topaz International.

Such clients use Topaz airfare audits to verify that travel management companies and travelers are booking the lowest logical airfares and are taking advantage of negotiated rates. In addition to identifying cost savings or missed opportunities, Topaz airfare audits can also tell whether corporate fares and compliance are performing at or above average through the Topaz National Database—an industry leading benchmarking tool that measures fare performance on top city pairs against other companies. "They have a particularly good and unbiased reputation in the industry," said one client.

"Our Best Interests at Heart"

One global professional services firm, which has leveraged the power of Topaz International for more than a decade, uses the unbiased airfare audits to validate that its travel management company is providing the best fares and services to corporate travelers.

For this firm, with more than \$100 million in air spend, the audit reports have become a regular component and important feature of the company's corporate travel management strategy, according to the firm's director of travel services. "I receive an audit report every month, and while our agents are particularly good at what they do, there are times when they don't find the best fare," the director said. "There are times when Topaz finds better fares for us."

This buyer views the report online and looks at the statistics, seeing if there were any itineraries that were not compliant, or if the counselor did not find the lowest rates. "Then I go back to the particular itinerary and see what it is and go back to the travel management company if need be," the director said.

"It makes us feel comfortable that the TMC we deal with has qualified people and our best interests at heart," the travel executive added.

Making Noncompliance Nonexistent

The audits also serve as a valuable check on noncompliance on behalf of both the traveler and the agency. "If I see 3 or 4 passenger name records that are out of policy a month, that's a lot," said the director of travel services, whose traveler compliance exceeds 90 percent. Thanks to Topaz measuring the pulse of corporate travel compliance, "We feel very comfortable that people are making the right decision."

The buyer praised the thoroughness of Topaz audits in those rare instances when fares booked by a traveler or counselor were higher than other available fares, noting details of "which fare was lower, on what carrier, in what class of service—all of those things that you need to know."

Since no two companies or travel program are alike, Topaz customizes audits to client needs, allowing them to set parameters for measuring performance and service.

Keeping Agents On Point

While Topaz's services provide benefits to corporate travel programs, it also translates to benefits for the travel management company, such as validating the TMC's services to its client, and on occasion, showing room for improvement. Audits can help identify any issues with travel counselors, evaluate agent performance and pinpoint training needs.

One global project specialist for a travel management company said a Topaz audit "keeps everybody on their toes."

The audits help to support the value the corporate travel agency aims to provide to clients. "It's beneficial to have Topaz auditing because it drives into the travel counselor that you can be on a Topaz audit at any time," the TMC employee said. "These things can happen at any time and you have to remain consistent for the client."

The "Watchdog" Role

In addition to providing the company's travel department and its travel management company with a wealth of data, Topaz's known role as a watchdog helps to keep travelers and agents in line.

To demonstrate the effectiveness of the audits, the director of travel services at the global professional services firm conducted a trial shifting the audits from monthly to quarterly, and noted, "Once you let up, you find that people become a bit more careless about it." By keeping the audits ongoing on a monthly basis, "Our travelers know that it's going to be audited and our TMC knows it's going to be audited, so it's a worthwhile investment."

Another Topaz client at an industrial supplies manufacturer, agreed. "During the audit period, the pressure is on the travel counselors to make sure that they are finding the lowest fares and providing the documentation," said the global travel manager.

In addition to demonstrating the potency of travel agency services, the director of travel services at the global professional services firm said the audits also show the effectiveness of the travel department to the rest of the company, especially those at the C-level. "When an internal audit comes our way, and they do every two years, they want to know whether our program and TMC are the right ones for us, and it helps validate that they are," the executive said.

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About Topaz

Topaz International is the global leader for auditing and other strategic services to the corporate travel management professional. Topaz has over 30 years of experience of auditing airfares and other travel related expenditures and supporting travel managers, buyers and agencies to improve performance and facilitate cost savings. Topaz will assist you in validating savings during these difficult economic times.

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