Coupa Expands into Travel with Booking Module

Business spend management platform Coupa is launching its long-anticipated travel booking module, built from its acquisition of Pana and integrated into its expense and, ultimately, its payment platforms.

Coupa's travel booking tool, which it now is beginning to offer to U.S.-based customers on both its web and mobile platforms, aims at "unifying travel and expense," Coupa VP of product management Valerie Layman said. Users can plan trips on the tool with the help of itinerary suggestions tailored to the user, one of Pana's key features, and upon booking, it creates line items in an expense report based on the selections. The Travel Saver tool, built from Coupa's acquisition of Yapta, monitors bookings for price changes in case there's a chance for savings with rebooking.

Sabre is providing content for the tool, and Coupa also has partnered with Travel Leaders Corporate to provide around-the-clock live agent assistance, Layman said.

In addition, the tool features a "Spend Coach" that shows travelers what they are saving by booking through Coupa, where they can access not only their company's negotiated rates but also pre-negotiated rates offered by Coupa via Coupa Advantage. That feature will evolve to provide data and benchmarking to help companies develop policies around spending, Layman said.

Within the first half of this year, Coupa plans to offer integration with Coupa Pay, where users can generate a virtual card to pay for their bookings. Sourcing optimization tools are on the horizon as well.

"We want to take that data and start prescribing sourcing opportunities, which suppliers you should be sourcing with and what those rates would be," Layman said. "We've been building out templates and processes and will start doing early adopter reviews with some customers shortly."

That will include rate loading and auditing support as well, she added.

Midsize travel programs will be the initial target audience, particularly since it will initially be available only to U.S.-based users, albeit with global travel booking capabilities. Coupa plans to make it available on a more global basis "pretty quickly," Layman said.

Coupa does "not envision selling travel as a standalone" product, according to Layman. "The power of what we're doing is in that deeply unified experience and bringing all of that to the table."

Coupa already had sunset the Travel Saver product as a standalone option for travel management companies, and Layman confirmed that is the case for Pana as well. Pana initially had been designed as a tool to manage

guest travel bookings. Coupa has "done a lot of work" to turn Pana into an employee-based travel booking system and is working to build back the capabilities for it to be used as a guest booking tool, though that will remain part of the larger platform, she said.

Clients who already have established travel booking tools will be welcome to continue using those, she added.

"We still support integration with other booking tools in the expense solution," she said. "We will continue to be an open platform, and if you have a booking solution you prefer to use, it's your choice."

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