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Nudged By Client iRobot, World Travel Inc. Builds Customizable Portal Product

By Jay Campbell • November 15, 2018

New York — World Travel Inc. is targeting the end of the first quarter of next year to release a new portal product that gives corporate clients more control to display what they want to travelers and managers.

Buyers can configure sites differently by country, and include not only typical travel management applications but also videos and social content.

Telling customers about this and other new products here at a client conference last month, chief innovation officer Rock Blanco credited iRobot global travel manager Shelby LeMaire with pushing her TMC in the new direction.

According to LeMaire, Blanco over-delivered.

"Rock ran with this initiative shortly after joining World Travel and is not only working on creating a portal that allows for global customization, but also took it to the next level," she

said. "Alexa as an added feature to assist travel managers with having information at their fingertips was a 'wow' when I saw the first prototype."

At the client conference, Blanco asked Alexa such questions as "Where are my travelers today?", "Who is in London?" and "Do I have any trips that need approval?" Alexa spoke the answers and offered to email results.

LeMaire said she considered the new portal an essential tool as iRobot expands globally. The Bedford, Mass.-based consumer robot company known for the Roomba vacuum recently added nine markets to its travel management program, for a total of 13. The portal communicates policies, procedures, risk management information and industry news.

LeMaire's main challenge was providing relevant information to employees outside the United States. She surveyed road warriors

about World Travel's existing portal solution to find out what they needed.

"My goal was to design a portal that would allow me to communicate from the corporate standpoint while at the same time focusing on traveler engagement," said LeMaire. "Our policy is global. We're trying to standardize processes and procedures the best we can. We can't do that in all cases, as processes vary around the globe. So we need flexibility to meet demands, needs and differences. We wanted to come up with solutions to incorporate, say, social media and videos, and have it be engaging."

The portal product comes with an editing tool that connects to a library of standard widgets and key performance indicators. Clients can build a "daily highlights" update.

"It's not just a fresh coat of paint," Blanco said. "This is something totally new." The company chose to host the software with Amazon Web Services for speed, performance and scalability.

A "where are my travelers?" feature overlays U.S. State Department risk profile data. Another display indicates the impact on specific travelers of weather or other transportation issues.

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Rock Blanco
World Travel Inc.
Chief Innovation Officer



For iRobot, the portal builds on a general effort to improve its understanding of multinational corporate travel management. Also based on LeMaire's feedback, World Travel built a global "capabilities matrix" that equips travel managers "with the information they will need to know before they can effectively function in a new market location," she said. This "all-encompassing" matrix collects data on cultural nuances, technical and operational differences, risk management and other elements.

LeMaire leverages the Radius global network, but in a different way than some corporate accounts. World Travel Inc. has its own bilateral arrangements with the Radius partners in iRobot's markets.

"This strategy enables World Travel to function as the overarching agency to define, measure and monitor agency service requirements, and to have more oversight on what is important to its customers," said LeMaire.



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Shelby LeMaire
iRobot, Global Travel Manager

"It's instrumental that World Travel has the ability to ensure the partner agencies are meeting its clients' expectations and also to make improvements immediately," she added. "Eliminating Radius allows World Travel to effect changes more rapidly, versus going through Radius where there have been delays. Obviously, if an agency fails to meet performance standards, World Travel can move in a different direction."

Radius and World Travel officials said the configuration was not unusual.

Radius members are "encouraged and adept at creating a solution among themselves for clients," said Alex Olsen, senior director of the Radius Travel global agency network. Clients or their TMCs may opt to use their own data consolidation or other services that also are available from Radius, he noted.

The iRobot contract with World Travel defines a scope of work specific to each country "with a sensitivity to cultural nuances," said LeMaire. "I created a standardized service-level agreement with performance metrics for iRobot's global markets, which is full circle between iRobot, World Travel and the partner agencies."

LeMaire has twice served on World Travel's client advisory board, which last month impaneled 13 new participants for 2018-2019.

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