

Lync 2013 Customer Solution Case Study



American Express Global Business Travel Embraces Unified Communications to Enhance Travel Service, Conserve Costs

Company: American Express Global Business Travel

Website:

www.americanexpress.com/businesstravel

Country or Region: Global

Industry: Corporate travel

Partner: Clarity Consulting

Partner Website:

<http://connect.claritycon.com>

Company Profile

Positioned at the intersection of commerce and travel, American Express Global Business Travel offers its customers a comprehensive network, service dependability, and deep insight to help move people and businesses forward.

Software and Services

- Microsoft Server Product Portfolio
 - Microsoft Lync Server 2013
- Microsoft Office
 - Microsoft Lync 2013
- Third-party software
 - Clarity Connect

For more information about Microsoft Lync Server 2013, go to:
www.microsoft.com/lync

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Kathy Brennan, Global Service Delivery Leader, American Express Global Business Travel

For more than 20 years, American Express Global Business Travel has provided business travel services to Microsoft travelers. The company and Microsoft recently implemented Microsoft Lync and Clarity Connect to support a virtual call-center environment that offers streamlined communication between agents and travelers.

Business Needs

Every day, approximately 5,000 Microsoft employees travel. In fact, the company spends more than US\$800 million each year to get them where they need to be. Like many enterprise organizations, Microsoft relies on American Express Global Business Travel to help its business travelers book their travel; American Express Global Business Travel makes nearly 10,000 reservations across 75 countries each week on behalf of Microsoft.

Microsoft Travel, the Microsoft service division that works with American Express Global Business Travel, wanted to harness the latest technology to streamline the travel experience for Microsoft employees. “We wanted to work with American Express Global Business Travel to find ways that agents could help our travelers even more, sometimes before they even knew they needed help,” says Eric Bailey, Travel Technology Manager at Microsoft. In the past, for example, if weather caused flight cancellations, travelers needed to

figure out which of seven American Express Global Business Travel phone numbers to contact, based on their geographical location and time of day, and reach out for help. Microsoft Travel and American Express Global Business Travel envisioned a different experience: American Express Global Business Travel agents would watch for cancellations, proactively rebook affected Microsoft travelers, and successfully contact them to alert them to the changes.

To facilitate that kind of responsiveness and interaction, American Express Global Business Travel established a team of worldwide Microsoft-dedicated agents who worked from home offices. “We realized that asking agents to work virtually would make our crisis management a lot more efficient because it would be so much easier for them to jump in and help when we had a spike in calls,” says Kathy Brennan, Global Service Delivery Leader at American Express Global Business Travel.

Certain capabilities were necessary for the two companies to achieve their shared vision. For example, the agents would need



bandwidth and voice quality, secure network access, an automated way for Microsoft travelers to reach them, and effective means of reaching out to those travelers. "We determined that adjusting our service model and adopting advanced tools would not only benefit our customers, but also generate ancillary benefits, such as reducing costs and increasing flexibility," says Brennan.

Solution

Together, American Express Global Business Travel and Microsoft embarked on a project to revolutionize the Microsoft traveler experience. They chose to use the latest release of Microsoft Lync to support an integrated "click-to-call" system that would provide the foundation of a new traveler-centric service model. "Using Lync has become such a part of doing business internally at Microsoft that we knew we could easily extend it into our relationship with American Express Global Business Travel," says Bailey.

American Express Global Business Travel was attracted to the idea of using Lync functionality to make a difference in the lives of both its agents and its travel customers. The two companies worked with Clarity Consulting, a Microsoft partner with a Silver competency in Communications who has deep expertise in delivering contact center functionality for Lync. Together with Microsoft IT, Clarity deployed Clarity Connect, a full-featured contact center product that is native to Lync and adds automated attendant, call queuing, skills-based routing capabilities, and real-time monitoring and historical reporting functionality. Clarity then configured the product with new workflow paths that would maximize the benefits that Microsoft employees would realize by using Lync as the communication tool that they use to reach American Express Global Business Travel.

In October 2013, 75 global Microsoft-dedicated agents moved to a virtual call center model. All agents were then given computers with Microsoft Lync 2013. With a

single sign-on, agents can use Lync to securely communicate with Microsoft travelers through audio calls, email, and instant messaging, and later in 2014, Microsoft employees will be able to escalate instant messages that have been routed to agents to audio and videoconferences. Agents use the built-in presence functionality to quickly check if certain travelers are available and to communicate their own availability, so that the solution can instantly connect the agents with the travelers who need their particular regional knowledge and skill sets. As for the Microsoft travelers, they use Lync 2013 from their desktops or Microsoft Lync Mobile from their mobile devices.

American Express Global Business Travel continues to expand the solution geographically. By the end of 2014, the company will be able to provide "follow-the-sun" service, in which travelers' calls are automatically routed to the agent who is available and best equipped to handle those specific travelers' needs.

Benefits

By adopting Lync, American Express Global Business Travel is making gains in agility, agent satisfaction, cost savings, and, most importantly, customer service. "Taking advantage of such innovative technology gives us the opportunity to truly add value to our relationship with Microsoft," says Brennan. "Thanks to the latest release of Microsoft Lync, we are transforming the traveler's typical call center experience into a more effective interaction."

Enhanced Accessibility

American Express Global Business Travel has made it possible for travelers to easily find people who can help them, regardless of the hour or location. "An American Express Global Business Travel agent is immediately available from Microsoft travelers' Lync contact lists on any device, and they can connect through a single click," says Bailey.

Through its use of Lync, American Express Global Business Travel also can be more proactive in helping Microsoft travelers get to crucial business meetings and, even better, get home again as quickly as possible, even as itineraries change. "We're taking the initiative and reaching out to help travelers avoid delays," says Brennan. "Our agents have greeted their new roles and Lync tools with enthusiasm because they can actively make customers' lives better and drive satisfaction."

Increased Flexibility

Today, American Express Global Business Travel has greater agility when it comes to scheduling and hiring agents because Lync offers the ability for agents to connect from any home office through any Lync-enabled device without having to set up costly virtual private networks (VPNs), as long as they are connected to the Internet. Extra agents can work for just a few hours if storms cause unexpectedly high call volumes, and those same storms no longer create problems for agents who used to have to struggle through bad road conditions to get to a call center. "We can make sure that we have adequate coverage at all times, and our agents appreciate that they now avoid commuting," says Brennan. "Plus, the ability to contact their Microsoft customers with their choice of instant messaging, email, or phone means that agents can tailor the interaction to suit the customer's availability and preferences."

Competitive Advantage

American Express Global Business Travel considers its new use of Lync and Clarity Connect a competitive differentiator, and the company expects to package the solution to offer to its other enterprise customers and enhance it over time with more powerful software features. "We are excited to augment our service delivery repertoire with this sort of forward-thinking solution, which we believe will be appealing to many of our large customers," says Brennan.