

GetThere Uses Game To Teach Booking Savvy

By Mary Ann McNulty

Sabre Holdings' GetThere last month launched a training game designed to teach travel arrangers and travelers how best to make corporate policy-compliant online air, hotel, car and rail bookings. Travel Hero is the booking systems' first attempt to use game techniques in training. In the first month it garnered more than 200 players.

The game personifies a typical, multitasking travel arranger—bombarded with emails, instant messages and phone calls—and challenges players to search for or book travel services. Correct answers to multiple-choice questions score points, with bonuses for speedy responses.

Designed to be played repeatedly by users, the game internally was developed by GetThere University, along with site management, implementation and usability lab teams. GetThere University is a group responsible for “designing, developing and delivering training, documentation and learning around the booking tool,” according to GTU global learning services manager Joan Osborn.

A leaderboard tracks the 20 top-scoring players. At the conclusion of each game, all players learn their scores and rankings. Developers considered badges and other prizes, Osborn said, but research indicated that the leaderboard would provide users with sufficient bragging rights and incentive to play again.

While aimed at multitasking travel arrangers, travelers are welcome to play. Registered GetThere users can access the game itself and more than a dozen tutorials from a support page within the tool.

Custom Versions Coming?

GetThere last March at a users meeting first introduced corporate clients and resell-

ers to the training game. In recent months, GetThere incorporated suggestions from those early testers to slow the pace of incoming messages and provide more time to complete the game.

The “overwhelming feedback” was a desire for a “customized version of the game with our travel policy at XYZ Corp.,” said GetThere marketing communications manager Michael Brophy. At press time, GetThere officials were in talks with “more than a dozen firms, most of them multinationals, interested in custom versions of this,” he added. GetThere would charge for a custom version, but companies could use their branding, policies and even employee pictures.

Osborn estimated it would take about 10 minutes for a user to complete all three levels of the game. “Questions in each level introduce new functionality,” she added. In the last level, a traveler stops by the travel arrangers' desk to ask a question in person.

GetThere long has focused on travel arrangers. “We came to know very quickly the power and influence of the arranger to the success of your program,” Brophy said. “When they're unhappy they're telling people with VP and C in titles.”

While travel arrangers in North America make between 30 percent and 40 percent of GetThere bookings, the figures are “significantly higher in other regions of the world,” Brophy added. “Fifty percent is most accurate for both Europe/Middle East/Africa and Latin America regions. In the Asia/Pacific region it usually ranges between 70 percent and 80 percent of trips being booked by arrangers.”

Booking volume growth in these regions further magnifies the importance of making arrangers comfortable with making

in-policy reservations. Latin America and Asia/Pacific 2012 booking volumes rose by more than 30 percent year over year through July, while EMEA bookings were up by more than 10 percent during the same period, officials said.

In addition to the game, the GTU team developed more than a dozen tutorials. The most-viewed tutorials relate to getting started, navigation support, making a flight reservation, making a hotel reservation and the game itself, Brophy said. One of the tutorials is available in Spanish, Portuguese and French Canadian, in addition to English. A tutorial for travel managers on GetThere's new policy administration application and one for all users on ticket manager functionality are coming next quarter.

The policy administration functionality is designed to support the most sophisticated policies and will allow managers to configure the system themselves, Osborn said, adding that the tutorial “isn't a start-to-finish or linear process.” Instead, managers select a topic to learn how to configure the application, and understand the conditions under which rules would apply and how the system would respond when the conditions are met. Managers would have the ability to “practice setting rules and we'll give them a success or fail notice.”

In the ticket manager tutorial, the development team plans to introduce an “avatar” to deliver key messages and show users “how easy it is to cancel online rather than pick up the phone to cancel a ticket,” Osborn said.

