

A.T. Kearney Advances Broad Green Travel Strategy

By Jay Boehmer

When global consulting firm A.T. Kearney last year pledged carbon neutrality by the end of 2009, travel quickly became the focal point. At the behest of senior management, the firm's travel department—working with a broad coalition of divisional leaders, consultants and scientists—moved to measure and then offset carbon emissions derived from corporate travel, building a sustainability program from scratch and setting standards for carbon reporting.

A.T. Kearney now measures the entirety of emissions stemming from travel, using United Nations-approved and scientifically vetted tracking methods and drilling down to country, unit and employee levels. The company also has begun billing back the cost of carbon to its units and reinvesting those funds into sustainability projects, in addition to carbon trade-offs. A.T. Kearney also moved to limit travel when appropriate, shift to more environmentally friendly modes of transport and work with carbon-efficient suppliers.

A.T. Kearney determined travel contributed more than 80 percent of its company-generated emissions. "We don't do manufacturing, we don't have a lot of facilities. People are our core product—we sell intellectual capital," said director of global travel Margaret Hansen. "Travel got a lot of focus within the firm."

Hansen said the company already operated a consolidated travel program, with global travel data centralized through a single agency, expense reporting system and corporate card provider. That eased the transition to emissions reporting, she said, though standards for collection remained elusive. "We worked on this for a year and a half, looking for data sources," she said. "I was not able to find anything that mapped out for me how I was going to come up with a calculation on a global level with a consistent standard."

The company enlisted United Nations-endorsed scientists to help measure travel emissions. Hansen noted that carbon-emission calculations "have not

been fully standardized and it can be very confusing when you look at the variety of offset prices in the marketplace." As an example, Hansen noted inconsistencies in carbon offsets pulled from a scientific site, an airline Web site and a public travel site, ranging from \$35.46 to €81—all for the same flight between London and New York.

"There are different ways you can measure and calculate," Hansen said. "We went for the full boat: If there's a choice between one, two or three—we're three. We'll pick the top, the high end. If the metrics behind that get better, maybe we'll improve, but we're not going to do anything short of calculating 100 percent of our carbon footprint."

A.T. Kearney now incorporates emissions data in requests for sourcing the greenest suppliers, seeking aircraft and engine data from airlines and looking for environmentally audited and certified hotels.

The travel department reports key performance

indicators for carbon emissions quarterly. "Global finance takes that information and bumps it up against our net fees, and it's billed back out to each one of the units and we begin to set the targets. There's a goal to reduce emissions by 20 percent. While we will become carbon neutral by the end of next year, each of the units is also expected to reduce by a percentage. This information is reported quarterly and

we're running into our third quarter of reporting, so we're pretty far along into the process now."

The company went a step further by investing in its own sustainability projects, seeing each carbon-offsetting dollar is invested "in climate-protecting projects that meet the highest international quality standards and sending consultants out to do the actual work," Hansen said, noting those projects meet the United Nations-endorsed Gold Standard.

To further facilitate emissions reductions, Hansen participates in a monthly call with A.T. Kearney leaders across the globe to discuss local initiatives. Some units have greened meeting site selection, set rail-over-air policies, instituted a bicycle-purchase program for local employees and implemented remote conferencing systems.

"It's interesting to see," Hansen said of local sustainability projects, "how every office is going to be diverse and do what works for them." ■

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MARGARET HANSEN
A.T. KEARNEY

