

# Cisco Putting Social Networking To Work

By Seth Harris

The adoption of Web 2.0 technology into its managed corporate travel program has eased the massive change management process for 66,000 employees, help to significantly shrink internal travel and provided Cisco Systems' travel and meetings team a real-time automated conduit from its customers—the Cisco traveler population. Director of travel, meetings & events Susan Lichtenstein, who joined Cisco in August 2007, has overseen the new communications initiative for the \$458 million global travel program by leveraging internal resources, actively producing content and building a travel management communications framework to promote policy and preferred vendor compliance.

After rolling out a new global travel policy for the first time in 10 years in April, Cisco has phased one region into the new policy monthly and continued to deploy its online booking tool.

Within the first month of the policy rollout, the travel forum became the most viewed site in the San Jose, Calif.-based company, receiving about 10,000 hits. In the policy section alone, there were 6,000 views.

Lichtenstein administrates her own weekly blog with three running topics, such as obtaining a visa. A travel team member answers posts within a 24-hour period. If a topic question is posted multiple times, it is compiled into a message thread or the frequently asked questions page.

The new policy married with the social networking format has driven down internal travel and further standardized travel processes globally, which has aided in a companywide savings goal of more than 20 percent of global travel costs.

Lichtenstein drew not only on the Cisco travel and meeting and events team, which merged last year, but also leveraged a cross-departmental team from corporate communications, marketing, internal project managers and IT to help build the forums and administrate the process.

Lichtenstein also had Cisco's preferred online booking tool, GetThere, add feedback applications

through which travelers could opine on preferred vendors or question policy.

Through the tool's messaging capabilities, travelers who book a trip for an internal meeting are offered four travel alternatives, including Cisco's TelePresence facilities and its WebEx Webconferencing tools. Thereafter, managerial approval is required to allow such a trip. Previously, approval was required for all travel.

"We were managing to the rule and not to the exception," said Lichtenstein "To be successful, if somebody is following the rules, we need to let them keep going and give great metrics to report back to managers. Now, instead of getting approval on 100 percent of the tickets, maybe we get approval on 20 percent, but it's much easier to continue to improve the program when you see what the exceptions are."

Cisco's travel team quickened its pace using the

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SUSAN LICHTENSTEIN  
CISCO SYSTEMS

social networking approach by providing online training through Webinars and video on demand and reaching out to thousands of travelers without e-mailing, making phone calls or traveling to all corners of the globe.

For example, Cisco recently became one of the first corporations to deploy an online booking program in Russia. "We are able to communicate with all of Russia at

one time through our Web 2.0 technology, instead of sending 10 people there to train them," Lichtenstein said.

Social networking within a managed travel program environment has been slow in taking off for many corporations, as such issues as the cost of administration and enabling travelers to comment negatively on preferred vendors or policy are at the forefront of the debate, but Lichtenstein said the applications' growth is inevitable.

"Generation Y is here and this is the way people communicate today," she said. "Don't be afraid to do this internally in your company. People want that instant gratification. They want a place they can go on their time, 24/7. They want responses immediately if they can have them. They want to be heard and talk to people in the company, not just me. They want to talk to each other." ■