As travelers of all ages have become increasingly comfortable using technology to research and book their travel, some are tempted to go outside of preferred corporate booking channels. Most often, these travelers are under the false assumption that they have found a “better deal,” unaware of negotiated supplier add-ons, discounts and upgrades, as well as the increasing importance of following policy in order to benefit from safety and security measures if necessary.

To help ensure compliance, travel managers have been turning to the concept of traveler centricity—focusing on the needs and wants of their travelers to provide tools and solutions that their travelers want to use in order to serve corporate and traveler needs. (See “The Move to Traveler Centricity” white paper from The BTN Group and Travel and Transport for more information on this growing trend: www.businesstravelnews.com/Business-Travel-Research/White-Papers)

At all levels of the organization, a key component of traveler centricity is VIP services and the personal assistance available from TMCs to augment the standard booking tools used for research and booking.

> TIERED SERVICES

While the specifics will vary from TMC to TMC, most offer a range of VIP services designed to enhance the value for travelers at different levels.

TOP TIER

The top tier of service is usually reserved for the president, CEO and perhaps a handful of others from the C-suite—those who need immediate and dedicated attention at any hour. For this top level, corporations should expect one or more agents dedicated specifically to their account so that the VIP or their assistant is ensured continuity of personalized service. Such agents are available 24/7 and connected via a range of technology, such as smartphones, laptops and iPads, so that the executive may communicate at any time via their preferred method.

At this level, TMC services go beyond standard travel management into execution of the trip on the whole. Agents may be asked to secure dinner or theater reserva-
FOR THE ELITE
As the fifth largest corporate travel management company in the United States, Travel and Transport specializes in corporate travel management along with group and meeting travel services. A leader in online travel technology, Travel and Transport also places a high priority on personalized service and support at all levels of travel management. Nancy Miller, vice president of operations, discusses the importance of VIP and personalized services.

**What VIP services does Travel and Transport offer?**
We have three levels of VIP services. At our highest level, Concierge Services, top-level execs work with agents dedicated to their account who are available 24/7 to do anything from arrange a meet and greet to make sure the right kind of water is in their guest room. Following that is our standard Executive Services level, designed for other executives and road warriors, where a large focus is procuring upgrades and value-adds. We also offer Elite Choice, an in-house after-hours emergency service staffed by high-level agents.

**How does Travel and Transport obtain upgrades or add-ons if corporations haven’t contracted them directly with the supplier?**
We have our own resources and a large network we turn to. As a charter member of Virtuoso, we frequently utilize their resources for our VIP travelers as this organization is focused on providing extraordinary travel experiences.

**What are some of the unusual VIP services Travel and Transport has provided?**
Many of our services focus on ensuring top-level VIPs have exactly what they need: a specific type of chocolate in the guest room, a particular hair dryer, scented candles lit prior to arrival. But many others are focused around time and comfort, such as meet and greet services to navigate a VIP through the airport, luggage delivery or security requests. We have even arranged a private tour of a home in France that Picasso and Cocteau visited regularly to view personal drawings and notes written on the walls by the artists. Whatever a VIP wants, we will deliver it.

tions, arrange meet and greet services, secure preferred amenities in the guest room, manage frequent flier accounts and more. In addition to flight monitoring and other services that have become standard at all levels, top-tier executives should also expect proactive account management—these dedicated agents will personally monitor flights, for example, and immediately move to rebook if necessary rather than simply notify the traveler of a delay.

**EXECUTIVE SERVICE TIER**
This level of service is usually reserved for the secondary level of top travelers, which typically includes senior management and road warriors. Although not the 24/7 service of the top tier, this level is also focused on service and is particularly instrumental in securing room or air upgrades (see “Enhancing the Corporate Program” below), as well as proactively monitoring travel.

**AFTER-HOURS SERVICE TIER**
In addition to the 24/7 services offered to the highest levels, many TMCs will also offer after-hours services to a larger group of high-level travelers. Typically staffed by very experienced agents, the after-hours service can help with anything from rebooking a flight to helping make arrangements in the event of a natural disaster.

**> ENHANCING THE CORPORATE PROGRAM**
In addition to the personalized service that’s so important to a VIP program, a critical element of such a program is the ability to facilitate corporate negotiated upgrades as well as provide upgrades when the corporation or traveler would otherwise not be entitled to such perks.

“Some companies contract with their preferred suppliers for upgrades for their VIPs and we’re aware of what that is and make sure it happens,” said Nancy Miller, vice president of operations for Travel and Transport. “But when that’s not the case, we can use our own
connections and resources to ensure a room or air upgrade, amenity in the hotel room and so on.”

The TMC can also step in when a traveler should be entitled to a perk but is unable to book it because of availability. “With technology, travelers have become very self-sufficient in terms of getting their own upgrades, preferred seating and other perks,” said Mark Flaherty, vice president of operations for Ultramar Travel Management, recently acquired by Travel and Transport. “The TMC becomes especially important when the seats or upgrades that should be available aren’t available to the traveler. That’s when travelers pick up the phone to ask for help and we rely on our own leverage and contacts to make it happen.”

In addition, the TMC can help with fulfillment of corporate programs and individual traveler programs, such as an air carrier program for small businesses, and credit card and supplier loyalty programs. “Corporations can sign up directly with air carriers to be part of a small business program, but the corporation then relies on us, as the TMC, to manage the fulfillment of that program,” said Flaherty, noting that individual corporate travelers also reach out for help in fulfillment of their awards and points.

> TMC AS A CONSULTANT

Beyond the mechanics of fulfillment, Miller noted, “Travelers at all levels now expect a higher level of consultative services: How do I get the best deal? How do I take advantage of promotions?” To that end, today’s TMC agents must understand the needs and preferences of both the individual corporate traveler and the corporate policy to tailor the trip correctly.

To be sure, the agents must also be tech-savvy. “We’ve become keenly aware that travelers are researching before they reach out to us,” said Miller. “If a traveler finds a deal or package or upgrade online, we need to be able to confirm if it’s within policy and fits the other requirements of their corporate travel program.”

If the proposed travel arrangements do not meet the standards for the corporation, the TMC should be able to provide an alternative as good as or better than that proposed by the traveler.

Similarly, the TMC can function as a consultant in helping a corporation determine for which executives VIP service is appropriate, as well as the parameters of those services. “Our programs are all customizable,” said Miller. “When it comes to VIP service, the answer is never no.”

For more information about how Travel and Transport can add value for your VIPs, go to www.tandt.com.