

Personalising CORPORATE TRAVEL

Corporate Travel Management has never been afraid to try new things—an approach that has led the company to achieve huge success in Australian and international markets.

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When Corporate Travel Management (CTM) opened its doors just over 20 years ago, founder and Managing Director Jamie Pherous had a vision to offer the Australian business market a fresh and innovative alternative solution to travel. With a team of just two staff based in Brisbane, he set about developing a model that would provide a personalised, flexible, and cost-effective service for business travellers.

Jamie recognised there was a huge gap in the corporate travel industry and that it was missing three key ingredients. “It lacked a good personalised service. It was basically a call centre trying to drive down costs, which is fine but doesn’t really help you when you need expertise to do tricky itineraries; secondly, there was no technology that really added any value; and lastly, everyone was selling on the biggest discount and not on a return on investment which, at the end of the day, is what the customer wants. So that’s how it started, and those three values still underpin everything we do today.”

Slowly but surely CTM began to gain traction, and today, more than

two decades later, the business has achieved much success. It employs 1,800 staff in 23 countries around the world spanning Australia, New Zealand, the US, Asia, and Europe. In 2010, it listed on the Australian Securities Exchange, which was a proud moment. “We’ve grown every year,” Jamie says. “We’ve never gone backwards, which is quite remarkable in any business in any industry. As we grew, our clients said to us, ‘You know what: I wish you could do this in America, Asia, or Europe because we’ve got businesses there and we can’t find this sort of delivery.’ So we started to expand into other cities around Australia first and then offshore, maintaining localised support and account management in each region to ensure that we’re always delivering solutions that are relevant to our clients wherever they operate. We’ve clearly got a compelling value proposition, because it’s working.”

“From where we’re standing, we don’t think we’ve even touched the sides with what we can do in this business. There are other travel companies in the world that have sales of \$60–70 billion, and here we are with \$2.5 billion. The world is our oyster; there’s a lot of opportunity for us out there yet.”

Jamie says those three fundamentals that drove CTM in

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- Jamie Pherous

the early days—service, technology, and return on investment—still ring true. “I think a great business should always understand its competitive advantage and cherish those core values. In our business, that has never wavered.”

CTM employs people who are aligned with similar beliefs and attitudes in order to deliver the best possible service. Jamie believes that if you have good staff who care and listen to their clients’ needs, you can build better products and services. “People still like personalised service,” he explains. “Whether that’s doing a tricky itinerary for someone at the last minute, or knowing that there’s a familiar voice on the end of the phone during an emergency, you can’t achieve those things effectively through a call centre.”

Technology is then helping to elevate that personalised style of service even higher, and CTM is committed to its investment in developing tools through its SMART Technology platform that are revolutionising the corporate travel landscape. The feedback it is receiving from this strategy has been very positive, with clients saying that these tech-savvy tools are making corporate travel easier than ever before.

“In the past 20 years, we’ve realised very quickly that >



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technology is transforming our service offering,” Jamie says. “Our experience these days is that, particularly domestically, airfares are the lowest cost component of travel. Meals and taxis are much more expensive. So we’ve built and continue to build tools that tackle elements of business travel which have traditionally lingered around the peripherals of a managed travel program, and they are adding unbelievable value to our clients. An example is a tool we’ve developed to reduce taxi expenditure, which is a largely unmanaged component of corporate travel. We have the data to identify for a client which of their travellers is heading to a specific city and when, so why not utilise that intel to alert travellers of colleagues who could potentially share the cost of a cab, and halve or even third their taxi expenditure?”

“We’ve also developed technology that transforms the way travellers research and book corporate travel through intelligent visualisation of air and hotel inventory and price. So now our clients can search for a flight or hotel in four clicks, and what is returned to them is the best time and date to travel across 21 days on one screen. Forecasting tools like that are allowing our clients to buy better, think smarter, and get more value for their dollar.”

With a background in accounting, Jamie says return on investment is the third priority. “We have created reports that produce measurable, accountable data which not only identify where you are losing

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money, but identify the savings you can make by doing different things in your travel program.”

CTM has close relationships with its key suppliers and partners. Jamie believes this is another cornerstone of the business’s success. “We utilise the expertise of industry suppliers to build things for us in some instances, and some things we build ourselves if we see there’s a gap in the market. That way, we can be the first in the market to develop a great idea and deliver the benefits of those unique products or services to our clients. I think with suppliers you’ve got to really understand what they want. The reality is that they want to leverage you too so they can grow, and you want to deliver growth but deliver it with integrity so you’re not compromising that shared customer base. In doing that, there’s a lot of trust involved, and there’s also the sharing of knowledge to build a better service platform for customers, whether that’s an airline, a hotel, or a technology supplier.”

CTM has a goal to be the best it possibly can be in every region where it operates. It strives to have the brightest talent on board, to

win and retain clients, and to continuously improve through innovation. “That’s really the glue,” Jamie states. “We want to outperform the market everywhere we operate. We want to do that with higher client satisfaction and retention, and with higher staff engagement than anyone else. That’s the aspiration we have. You go back five years ago when we were just operating in Australia; now we’re in 23 countries in the four key regions—North America, Asia, Europe, and Australasia—and we want to make sure we’re the very best in every country we operate in. We want to set the benchmark in all those metrics in our industry.”

“In the past, there were only four big global travel managers that people could choose from when they wanted to do something multinational. Now we believe we’re a clear alternative because we can offer that global reach but with a personalised service that suits the local culture, with the best technology that adds value within a region, and by seamless global reporting that demonstrates a return on investment. We are already demonstrating our ability to do that, having won a number of regional and global clients, which we could never have done before.”