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Sending businesses into Orbitz

Kenosha native leads corporate travel arm of online enterprise

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When Kenosha-native Dean Sivley graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Parkside in the 1980s, booking a flight meant a visit to a local travel agency.

Two decades later, some of the skills Sivley learned at Parkside are helping him lead Orbitz for Business, the corporate travel arm of the online travel business Orbitz Worldwide. Sivley has been chief operating officer and general manager for the business travel arm of Orbitz for about two years.

Online travel continues to be one of the fastest growing segments of the travel industry, with more than 50 percent of trips now booked online.

But while shopping for the best deals for airline tickets and hotels online is now commonplace for individual consumers, business bookings have been slower to catch on.

“It’s a historical thing,” Sivley said, saying that corporations are sometimes in the habit of managing travel a certain way and are reluctant to move away from that model. “Managed corporate travel is still less than 50 percent (online) whereas if you look at unmanaged business travel, it’s at 70 percent.”

At Orbitz for Business, Sivley’s job is to try to capture as much of the corporate travel dollar as possible. Last year, revenue in the division grew 30 percent, with online transactions growing 25 percent.

Since 2003, Sivley said, Orbitz reached the 2,000 corporate customer mark, with more than 1 million individual corporate travelers.

Sivley grew up in Kenosha and graduated from Parkside in 1980 with a degree in business administration. “I thought Parkside served me well,” he said. “They had a very good computer program and a very good program in accounting.”

After graduation, Sivley worked for an accounting consulting firm, and later a series of corporate jobs. He graduated with an MBA from Columbia University in 1993, and worked at jobs both in the travel industry and at technology companies.

His expertise in both technology and the travel industry brought him to Orbitz in 2004.

Sivley currently lives in Philadelphia, commuting to his home there on the weekends while working during the week in Chicago. He plans to relocate his family to Chicago this year.

With his constant commuting, Sivley knows the world of business travel. The key to growing the business, he said, is giving business the tools to make organizing travel online as efficient as possible.

To make online travel services more attractive to corporate travelers, Sivley has helped organize Orbitz' customer care center for business travelers,

Reaching business travelers is sometimes more challenging than capturing the business of typical consumers because corporations often have complex rules that govern the way their employees travel, from specified airlines to rules on travel times and classifications.

The service works to make travel as convenient as possible, including alerting business travelers to flight delays through e-mail messages and recorded phone calls, a dedicated staff of support personnel including former air traffic controllers who monitor airline traffic and try to detect potential delays and alert travelers before those delays occur.

Orbitz also offers online networking for business travelers, allowing "road warriors" to discuss travel strategies online.

In the coming year, Sivley said, Orbitz plans to expand its business travel services to reach companies in Canada, the United Kingdom and Australia.

"The business has tremendous growth potential," Sivley said.