

# Case Study

## Direct Accommodations



## Strategic partnerships built on consultative guidance and genuine relationships deliver the most value

Edenred Pay Travel and Direct Accommodations have each partnered with various technology, fintech, and industry-specific companies. However, their direct partnership provides advanced services for their corporate travel clients.

### Background

#### Edenred Pay Travel

Edenred Pay launched its travel services in 2013, providing secure virtual card payments for corporate air and hotel reservations and agency fees. Edenred Pay Travel addresses the challenges that mid-market travel management companies (TMCs) face, from lost hotel authorizations to unapproved traveler spending.

Juliann Pless, SVP of Travel Solutions, and Cindy Lewis, VP of Regional Sales, oversee the travel program that serves companies in any industry requiring travel plans for recruits, interviewees, and contracted and unbanked employees.

Edenred Pay's virtual cards, ghost cards, and corporate purchasing cards help to mitigate fraud, improve policy compliance, and provide travel managers with comprehensive and customized reporting. The integrated payment solutions also remove the obstacles of direct billing.

#### Direct Accommodations

Direct Accommodations is a full-service travel management company with a scalable centralized booking solution for hotels, cars, and flights and a leisure division for corporate customer vacation planning. They provide:

- Travel planning and reservation assistance
- Rate negotiations and discounts
- Customized reporting with 24-hour support
- Group, meeting, and event travel planning

Founder and CEO Candace Pengra runs the mid-size agency with 150+ corporate clients providing travel solutions for

various businesses based in the U.S. that travel worldwide. Direct Accommodations will be celebrating its 10th anniversary in March 2024.

Their clients range from Fortune 500 companies to startups in a wide span of industries such as finance, technology, healthcare, manufacturing, disaster recovery travel, construction, crew travel, and any sector with travel requirements.

Direct Accommodations' corporate travel solutions include booking solutions, document retrieval, duty of care, customized reporting, and payment solutions. That's where the partnership with Edenred Pay delivers support.

### Challenge

While credit card authorizations are a necessary part of corporate travel, the process is often lengthy and complicated. Many corporate travel clients prefer to avoid the process.

Candace has a background in hotels and has experienced this problem firsthand. "I understood the credit card authorization process and how much of a nightmare it was when working directly with the hotels. It's usually a point of educating the front desk. They don't always know what to do with credit card authorizations, which frustrates travelers when they arrive and can't get checked in."

Many of Candace's clients have had this experience and regularly asked Direct Accommodations for help with authorization forms. It was a lot of work for corporate clients to call the hotels and figure out the card authorization process on their own.

### Solution

Direct Accommodations previously used physical credit cards and corporate cards to pay for their clients' corporate travel. To reduce the card authorization issues that her clients were

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facing, Candace looked into virtual cards as a payment solution.

Direct Accommodations has been a partner of Edenred Pay for two years. Prior to that, they were third-party partners with Edenred Pay through Direct Accommodations' data management company. However, the third-party partnership caused Candace to go into lengthy explanations about what each partner did in relation to what each client needed. She wanted to make the process as easy to understand as possible for her clients.

As a result, Direct Accommodations went into a direct partnership with Edenred Pay for the virtual card solution. "Virtual cards are the easiest way to handle the credit card authorization process," Candace noted. "And we wanted to be able to control the environment in our own booking tools and not have to explain a third party's involvement."

“ Through the partnership with Edenred Pay, we can better support our clients because we get notifications firsthand if there's an issue from the hotel rather than going to a third party first. ”

Candace Pengra, CEO, Direct Accommodations

"In every sales call and demo, we ask prospects how they are paying for hotels or cars," Candace explained. "Then we offer the virtual card solution and educate them on the benefits our clients have seen from using the Edenred Pay virtual card for corporate travel."

Direct Accommodations doesn't just propose virtual cards as a payment solution. They also give their clients and prospects the option to use plastic and ghost cards through Edenred Pay's program. Candace explains that there's one program that handles various payment types. The process makes it easier and more secure for her clients.

### Results

Partnering with Edenred Pay has been a positive experience for Direct Accommodations' agents based in nine states and their clients. Candace remembered, "The training was very simple. It was just a matter of getting everybody logged in and set up. Our customers that are using the Edenred Pay program directly haven't had any issues since implementation."

“ An additional benefit is the ease of use for our agents. They love the fact that they can go directly into the system, push what they need into our system, and have control of what's happening. ”

Candace Pengra, CEO, Direct Accommodations

"Although our agents were hesitant about virtual cards at first, they love it now that they've seen how the process plays out."

On average, each agent saves 10-15 hours a week with customers using virtual cards within the travel program.

Edenred Pay's virtual card solution also enhances the relationship between Direct Accommodations and their clients. It's another tool that Direct Accommodations offers that adds to their list of services, making them even more valuable to their customers. And their customers receive additional benefits as a result.

Customers have reported benefits from the virtual card program, such as:

- Reduced fraudulent activity by 100%
- 94% improvement in spend compliance

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- Saving between 10-18 hours each month reconciling charges

The payment portion of travel management can cause a lot of frustration for travel managers, businesses, and corporate travelers. But offering the right services helps to alleviate those problems. Candace noted that her corporate travelers reported a huge decrease in confusion at the front desk during check-in. Presenting a copy of the credit card authorization form with a virtual card attached makes the check-in process much smoother.

That's what the partnership between Edenred Pay Travel and Direct Accommodations accomplishes for their clients.

### The Value of a Partnership

Direct Accommodations prioritizes making corporate travel management secure and convenient for their clients. And they do that by collaborating with leading integrated payment gateways that provide reliable and secure payment processing solutions.

As Cindy Lewis of Edenred Pay Travel stated, "One of my favorite things about our partnership with Direct Accommodations is our relationship. It's something that you can't measure, but that makes me stop what I'm doing and respond when Candace calls."

"That feeling is mutual," said Candace. "I tell our customers that it's not just a virtual card, it's a relationship that we have. We wouldn't offer the virtual card if we didn't have such a good, direct relationship with Juliann and Cindy at Edenred Pay. Why would I take the time or effort to look for another payment solution or try to figure that out when I know I can just pick up the phone and call Cindy or Juliann? It's a huge benefit of the partnership."

"And other agencies should know about that aspect of working with Edenred Pay Travel. When I'm closing a deal, I can always bounce ideas off Cindy. Then we have a very clean conversation with our customers. Cindy and Juliann have helped close our deals as much as I've closed deals."

Juliann Pless added, "It's important to note that it's not a transactional relationship, it's a mutual partnership. That's how we approach it – together."

### Conclusion

Candace reiterated, particularly for agencies, "If you're going on this journey, it should be with someone you can talk to who offers consultative guidance. It should be a team that helps, fixes problems, and brainstorms with you to develop ideas and different routes to make the job happen. Not everybody will do that. Cindy and Juliann always introduce alternate solutions if my solutions are not working. That kind of relationship is definitely a win – win for all of us."

Strategic partnerships like the one between Direct Accommodations and Edenred Pay Travel generate value for both parties as well as their clients. But more importantly, for Candace Pengra, Juliann Pless, and Cindy Lewis, it's a relationship first.