

Handling the risks, rewards of the travel management business

ACENDAS GOES FROM GOOD TO GREAT WITH SMART OPERATIONS AND THE SABRE SOLUTION

Travel can be complicated, expensive and chaotic. You know what this means if you've ever had to meet a travel budget, juggle itineraries or re-route a sales team headed to a new business meeting.

"Managing The Risk of Today's Travel" is the slogan of Acendas, a 30-year-old travel management company based in Mission, Kan. The Acendas tag line has never been more applicable.

Brent Blake, Acendas co-president, puts it this way: "We are risk managers who work in the travel industry," says Blake. To make his point, Blake starts counting off with his fingers. "There's the risk of overspending, the risk of not having all the information and visibility, and the risk of crisis management."

Because today's travelers face so many challenges on the road – meeting budgets, accessing timely information and dealing with weather and other uncertainties, Acendas helps clients navigate these challenges with efficiency. Acendas keeps an eye on emerging risks as well.

"Five years ago, 'duty of care' was not even mentioned," Blake says. "Companies are beginning to recognize their obligation to care for traveling employees. It's a real liability. And this goes way beyond normal travel planning. This is where we come in."

EXPERIENCE, SABRE SYSTEMS SHINE

Acendas leadership and key team members have over three decades of experience with travel and technology systems. Gary Davis, co-president with Blake, emphasizes the company's hands-on approach.



"Our team members are travel consultants, not agents. We ask lots of questions and listen closely so we can design the best travel management programs," Davis says. "This approach requires the human touch and the best tools."

Blake got into the travel business in 1981, focusing on corporate clients. Davis started in 1993 in leisure travel. In 2000, they joined forces to focus on three main areas: corporate travel management, meetings and incentives, and vacation travel planning.

Operating as co-presidents might seem like a recipe for conflict, but Blake and Davis are confident and comfortable with their respective strengths and capabilities.

"We have certain areas of responsibility," Blake says. "For example, I focus more on corporate travel management. Gary has great experience in leisure travel, IT and accounting, so he leads there. Our partnership really works because we value each others' opinions. It also helps that we are great friends. We don't just work together, our families vacation together, too."

In 2011, Blake and Davis came to another fork in the road. Growth and acquisition had created some fragmentation of systems and they recognized it was time to upgrade and consolidate. After extensive research, they selected Sabre as their primary technology partner.



Brent Blake

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*Brent Blake
Co-President
Acendas*



Gary Davis

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Gary Davis
Co-President
Acendas

Davis says the beauty of Sabre is in the single, comprehensive solution. They use *Sabre Red*® including *ClientBase*®, *Traveler Security*® and *Trams*® *Back Office* for accounting and administration.

“That is what makes us efficient decision-makers,” Davis says. “We would become more fragmented and less responsive if we had to access several different systems to run our business and gather information.”

Davis and Blake also like the fact that Sabre is a good advocate for the Acendas travel management business model.

“Here’s one example,” Davis says, “Sabre believes in aggregating content on airfares - bag fees, aisle seat charges, there’s a lot for a corporate travel manager to track. Sabre leadership advocates putting the data in one place for better decision-making, and that’s what we want for our clients, too. Sabre understands what business they’re in, and we appreciate that mindset.”

The decision to bring Sabre on board draws a relieved smile from Blake.

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FUNDAMENTALS NEVER GO OUT OF STYLE

The three interlocking rings in the Acendas logo have meaning and refer to the triple play concept in *Good to Great*, the business bestseller by Jim Collins. Blake and Davis are fans and try to integrate these elements into all operations.

Blake explains: “The rings represent what you can be best at doing, what drives the economic engine, and what you can be passionate about. We focus on those three things, and we want them to intersect as much as possible.”

He says good systems and operations have served them well. They develop a plan, stick to it, and carry it out. They look for vendors with similar approaches.

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STAYING AHEAD

1. “MANAGING THE RISK OF TODAY’S TRAVEL” IS THE ACENDAS MOTTO. IN BUSINESS SINCE 1982.
2. ACENDAS FOCUSES ON THREE MAIN AREAS: CORPORATE TRAVEL MANAGEMENT, MEETINGS AND INCENTIVES, AND VACATION TRAVEL PLANNING.
3. ACENDAS CONVERTED TO SABRE IN 2011.
4. A GOOD PARTNERSHIP FOR THE FUTURE – A COMPREHENSIVE SOLUTION, ALONG WITH THOUGHT LEADERSHIP AND ADVOCACY FOR THE TRAVEL MANAGEMENT INDUSTRY.