

Case study: Nirvana

# Tour operator creates a slipstream for improving booking transactions

With over 350 employees, Abu Dhabi-based Nirvana Travel and Tourism has 30 locations throughout the United Arab Emirates (UAE), as well as operations in China, Spain, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

## Challenge

 **Booking agents used physical credit cards** to book airline tickets and hotel rooms

 The team had to **validate transactions** against the booking, which took 3-4 days

**Inefficiencies** associated with its management  **900+** transactions a month

## Implementation

**VCA is integrated** into Nirvana's front-end booking platform using API connectivity 

 **Implementation** went smoothly and took just **5 months**

Citi trained Nirvana's program administrators on **Citi's reporting tools** 

## Result

True **end-to-end digitization** from automated card issuance to reconciliation 

-  **+ improved** operational efficiency
-  **+ lowered** costs
-  **+ reduced** errors

**Card use spend has increased by 50%**  resulting in higher rebates

## Challenge

Nirvana provides travel services, working with major global airlines and leading hotel chains. The company, which was founded in 2007, is growing rapidly and needed to find ways to improve efficiency, visibility and control.

One specific challenge faced by Nirvana related to its booking process. Booking agents used physical credit cards (with high credit limits) to book airline tickets and hotel rooms, with cards shared by multiple agents.

Nirvana's accounts payable team received a daily report from the booking agents which contained transaction amount and merchant details. However, it had no information about the underlying booking, creating reconciliation challenges. In addition,

the accounts payable team received a monthly statement from the card provider, which was manually reconciled against the booking report using only transaction amount and merchant name details as a reference. Consequently, the team had to contact various teams to validate transactions against the booking, which took 3-4 days and was prone to errors.

Nirvana sought to automate its booking process to cut processing timelines, automate its reconciliation process to reduce errors, and remove operational inefficiencies associated with its management of more than 900 transactions a month. Nirvana wanted to work with a local card issuer, with local implementation services, but needed a partner with global capabilities; it approached Citi for a solution.

## Implementation

Citi's UAE implementation team and Nirvana designed a project to transition the company from a resource-heavy manual payment process to a streamlined and automated procedure, with an improved and digitized reconciliation process.

Defined fields such as booking reference and client ID are used to enhance standard transaction information while a host-to-host transmission delivers the data daily, facilitating automated reconciliation. This replaces the previous weekly process, which was manual and error prone.

A key focus was management of fraud and risk. Nirvana decided to replace physical cards with Citi's Virtual Card Accounts (VCA). The in-built controls



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improve risk management by adding bespoke transaction-level controls that help to prevent fraud and provide transaction security. VCA is integrated into Nirvana's front-end booking platform using API connectivity, which streamlines and automates its backend processes. Virtual cards are automatically issued and delivered to suppliers in real-time at the click of a button.

Implementation went smoothly and took just five months. While Nirvana's IT team was new to API interfacing, with guidance and support from the Citi implementation team they quickly overcame the initial challenges around security certificates and XML formats to deploy a future-proof payment solution.

Before the project finished, Citi trained Nirvana's program administrators on Citi's reporting tools so they could easily view transactions and monitor compliance with the company's purchase policy.

### Result

Using Citi's VCA solution, Nirvana has re-engineered its entire operational process flow to achieve true end-to-end digitization, from automated card issuance for flight and hotel booking to reconciliation.

As a result, the company has significantly improved operational efficiency, lowered costs and reduced errors. In addition, enhanced transparency has facilitated improved working capital management and business forecasting.

By replacing its high limit physical credit cards with VCA, which offers bespoke controls to ensure transaction security, Nirvana's fraud and risk management has improved. Moreover, the solution has encouraged the company to maximize card use - spend has increased by 50% - resulting in higher rebates.

Nirvana now has a robust and fully automated online booking tool for its corporate and other clients, which provides a best-in-class customer experience.

"The travel and tourism sector is very dynamic and competitive," says Sultan Bou Dargham, Chief Financial Officer, Nirvana Travel & Tourism. "In order to remain a regional leader in providing travel solutions and bespoke travel services to our clients, an online risk-free digitized solution to facilitate the settlement process with our global travel and tourism partners was necessary. The solution gave us a boost to grow our business risk free, with strong controls and global reach."