



Case Study

Plascon

How automation helped
Plascon streamline its
corporate travel processes

With branches across South Africa and the African continent as well as Japan, Plascon is a dynamic, growing company with over 130 years of experience in the paints and coating industry. The company's employees regularly travel on business domestically, regionally and even internationally to conduct sales meetings, advise clients on-site and connect with colleagues.

Keeping track of travellers, travel bookings, and travel expenses in such a dynamic company is a difficult task. It becomes even more complicated when trying to achieve this with the help of excel spreadsheets, hard copy documents and long phone calls with travel consultants to make travel bookings. Yet, this is precisely how Plascon used to manage its travel before FCM South Africa helped them automated their travel processes.

Lee-Anne Du Plessis, Purchasing Manager, explains that Plascon's corporate travel processes used to be very traditional. "We found ourselves buried in administration. Not only was it a very manual, tedious and time-consuming process, the finance department was also struggling to reconcile the expenses and credit cards."

Although the prospect of change seemed overwhelming, Du Plessis explains the frustration with the outdated processes pushed her to look for better solutions. "That's how we came across FCM," she says.

Plascon adopted the FCM 'HUB', which gives travel managers, bookers and travellers access to multiple tools and resources via a single sign-on connection. The technology solution allows travellers and travel managers to manage pre-trip approvals and bookings, track travellers and do the reporting.

“We love the automation, the dashboard and the flexibility the HUB offers. Travellers’ profiles have been set up on the system so that travellers can easily make their own bookings without passing through several administrators and travel bookers. It’s very convenient to have everything in one place.”

The implementation process was straightforward, according to Du Plessis, and was completed within three months. “The FCM Team was efficient and implemented a strict project plan with weekly follow-ups and meetings. They assisted us with training and were readily available to answer all our questions. It was a partnership from the minute we started working with them.”

Although there was some initial resistance to change from some employees, the entire team is now on board and excited about the flexibility automation has brought to the travel process.

“Initially, especially the more seasoned travellers in the company struggled to embrace the process. They frequently lost their passwords and found it difficult not to rely on their personal assistants to handle things on their behalf,” Du Plessis laughs. “But now, everyone is on board and excited about the changes. The international platform also integrates all travel from Africa and South Africa into one system.”

The COVID-19 pandemic slowed down the automation process to some extent, Du Plessis explains. “As a business, we put in several restrictions. We preferred to go offline and do all the checks manually to ensure that all travel still followed the temporary company protocols and restrictions. The travel bookers at FCM have been a great help to us during this time.”

Du Plessis explains FCM kept the company constantly informed during the pandemic with details on restrictions, airline requirements and procurement details. “They provided us with valuable information on how we could limit and manage our travels during the pandemic and provided us with a clear overview on which travels were possible, which documentation was needed and which restrictions remained in place.”

Plascon’s travel programme is unlikely to return to ‘normal’ this year. Du Plessis explains the company is reviewing its travel spend and has adapted well to connecting virtually with the team and with suppliers. “We don’t want to go into exorbitant travel expenses, not knowing where the economy is heading. We have resumed travel for key employees in sales and marketing, supply and HR, as customers are expecting us to be on site. However, I don’t foresee the company resuming its normal travel programme within this year,” she says.

For Plascon’s future travel requirements, Du Plessis is confident FCM is the best TMC to not only help employees travel safely and with peace of mind, but also to save the company money and stay within a restricted post-COVID budget.

“FCM helped us to achieve a great number of savings on our travels and is still delivering monthly savings. We receive smart airline benefits and regular advice on how to achieve savings on our hotel programme as FCM offers us a comprehensive database of hotels at attractive prices,” concludes Du Plessis.

