Project Name
iTavel – UCR’s Travel Planning and Expense Reporting System

Project Institution
University of California, Riverside

Project Team
David Gracey – Director, Enterprise Application Development
Ra’ad Bahhour – Programmer/Analyst
Amber Jones – Support Specialist, Computing and Communications

Project Abstract

iTavel is a web-based system available to the entire UCR campus for planning business related travel and documenting expenses to request reimbursement in a completely automated and paperless fashion.

The UCR Travel system is one of the most flexible systems ever deployed on the UCR campus and one of the most well received (the system has hundreds of faculty self-service users). Knowing that campus departments have individual policies and procedures regarding travel, the system was developed with a tremendous degree of flexibility in order to meet the needs of all departments across campus. Since its release, over 10,000 trips have been electronically processed through the system and nearly 8,000 reimbursements have been generated.

- iTavel uses the Oracle 10g DBMS; the web interface is written in PL/SQL and JavaScript and is hosted by the Oracle Internet Application Server (iAS).
- Receipts are stored electronically as scanned images within the database.
- A real-time interface to the UCR Financial System (PeopleSoft) is included to electronically create travel vouchers (without re-keying) upon approval of travel expenses.
- The system uses the campus single sign of functionality known as CAS (central authentication services) and iTavel is integrated into the campus portals.
- iTavel is completely routing and e-mail enabled, with individuals providing on-line approvals based on e-mail reminders to take various actions.
- The system is flexible enough to meet the highly diverse needs of campus departments ranging from Administration, to Athletics, to Entomology.
- iTavel completely eliminates the need for paper, photocopies, and departmental shadow systems.

For more information, please visit the Travel Planning and Expense Reporting website at: http://cnc.ucr.edu/travel/
Authentication
To gain access to iTavel, the user must enter a valid UCR Net ID and password. The program authenticates against the UCR Enterprise Directory housed in LDAP. The Enterprise Directory is electronically maintained by some 200 departmental administrators distributed throughout campus. iTavel also utilizes UCR’s single sign on functionality known as CAS (central authentication services) and is completely integrated with the campus portal.

Authorization
Authorization occurs in a completely on-line, paperless environment. Campus Systems Access Administrators (SAAs) grant access to UCR’s enterprise systems via the Enterprise Access Control System (EACS). After authentication, the Travel system checks EACS to confirm user privileges and roles. For more information on the Enterprise Access Control System, please visit the following site: http://eacs.ucr.edu

User Roles and Routing Instructions
Several user roles are available within the system:

Traveler
Travel Coordinator
Departmental Pre-Approver
Departmental Final Approver
Accounting Approver

After assigning the appropriate roles to users within the organization, the SAA must specify travel routing instructions within the system. Each SAA must specify one default routing path to control how expense reports are electronically routed from Travelers to Travel Coordinators, and ultimately on for the necessary approvals.

Certain individuals may require optional pre-approval, or a different Final Approver than other Travelers. For example: departmental chairs require the approval of the college office, and coaches require approval of the VCA. These exceptions are handled within the system by specifying additional, Traveler-specific routing instructions.

As a trip is passed along, from one user to the next, automatic email notifications advise the recipient that a trip is in their queue waiting to be processed.
Traveler Profiles

Each Traveler has a profile within the system to store various values and preferences. There are several tabs within the profile for saving data elements such as airline seating preferences, vehicle license numbers, allergies, passports, FAUs, and more. This profile information is used to initialize many fields each time a Traveler creates a new trip.
**Travel Planning**  
After logging into the system, the Traveler can make use of the optional Travel Planning module. Travel Planning allows the Traveler to enter details about an upcoming trip. When starting a new travel plan, the system assigns a new Trip ID number and draws a great deal of Traveler settings and preferences from the user’s Traveler Profile.

The Traveler can then specify the type and purpose of the trip, departure and return dates and times, and other notes about the trip. Projected expenses are also entered, along with an ability to specify whether any pre-payments (direct charges) would be required.

The travel plan can then be submitted to the Travel Coordinator, who will review the requested dates and expenses. The Travel Coordinator can enter notes to the Traveler and either approve or deny the proposed travel. Upon approval, the Travel Coordinator can put the trip into Expense Reporting mode, specifying whether the Traveler or Travel Coordinator will be responsible for inputting actual trip expenses.
Travel Expense Reporting
When working in expense reporting mode, several tabs are available for entering Transportation, Lodging, Meals, and Other expenses. Depending on the type of expense being entered, the system will ask for various required fields. For example, when entering a Private Car expense, odometer readings are required for calculating the mileage reimbursement. If the Traveler incurred meal expenses, the reimbursable amount varies based upon the duration of the trip. A number of business rules are embedded within the program to determine which expenses require a receipt. As the Traveler enters expenses, those requiring a receipt are noted within the grid.
After all expenses are entered and submitted via the web, the Traveler gives all required receipts to his or her departmental Travel Coordinator. The Travel Coordinator then scans the receipts to PDF format and uses the web interface to attach the receipts to specific expense line items. Additional signed forms and exceptional approvals can also be scanned and electronically attached to the trip.
When complete, the trip is submitted back to the Traveler for review. The expense summary form displays all expenses, advances, and pre-payments, calculating the amount due (if any) to the Traveler. All receipts and electronic documents are just a click away for easy viewing.

With the Traveler’s certification, the expense report is now routed to the various approval entities before ultimately being processed by Accounting. At each approval step, the expense summary can be viewed, along with all the specific expense tabs and scanned documents. Upon Accounting Approval, a voucher is created electronically in real time within the UCR Financial System. A reimbursement is then generated for the Traveler on the next business day. The reimbursement can take the form of a printed check, or electronic funds transfer, as specified by the Traveler.
Flexibility

The UCR Travel system is one of the most flexible systems ever deployed on the UCR campus. Knowing that campus departments have individual policies and procedures regarding travel, the system was developed with a tremendous degree of flexibility in order to meet the needs of all departments across campus.

Travel Planning – This is an optional feature that can be used by departments that want to review (and/or approve) travel plans in advance of a trip.

Advances – Are available to departments that allow cash advances for travel.

Pre-pay Reimbursements – Provides reimbursements for any travelers who have paid for accommodations or made deposits on their personal credit cards.

Foreign Travel – The system accommodates domestic and foreign travel, including the ability to convert amounts to USA currency based upon specified exchange rates.

OCONUS – This travel includes trips where the destination is not foreign but is Outside the CONtinental United States – specifically Hawaii, Alaska, and all US possessions.

Actuals vs. Per Diem – Lodging, Meals, and Incidentals can be reported in either Actuals or Per Diem mode on Foreign and OCONUS trips.

Expense Reporting – Either the Traveler or Travel Coordinator can perform on-line entry of expenses on a trip-by-trip basis.

Document Imaging – Electronically stores all receipts as well as supporting documentation (signed/scanned exceptional approvals, etc.).

Search Engine – iTravel enables users to find previous expense reports through a robust search engine, providing search capability against dozens of data elements contained within the database.

Objective Customer Satisfaction Data / Benchmarks

iTravel has been deployed at UCR since March, 2004. Since its release, over 10,000 trips have been electronically processed through the system and nearly 8,000 reimbursements have been generated. Amazingly, the system was developed and deployed with the scarcest of resources, as only a single FTE was assigned to this project.
iTravel users have provided the following comments about the system:

From: Barbara Simandl <barbara.simandl@ucr.edu>, Physics and Astronomy

I came to UCR's Physics Department in May of 2006 while travel was still being produced on "hard copy". We have approximately 80 Travelers and Travel reporting at that time required a tedious process of doing the work on-line and then copying all forms and receipts on a copier prior to submitting to Accounting. In the old method, sometimes Travelers wouldn't get repayment for 30-60 days and, at times, paperwork would get lost.

Since using iTravel, the processing time has been cut in half and payment to our Travelers has been faster than it has ever been. There isn't any loss of receipts or paperwork and the amount of duplication is eliminated. The ease of use of iTravel is also a benefit!

From: Jodie Messin <jodie.messin@ucr.edu>, Botany and Plant Sciences

iTravel has been great for all of us at Botany & Plant Sciences. The faculty and staff like it because they can enter at their own pace and then submit for approval when trip is done. It's quick, easy to use, especially the foreign travel - Big improvement from using paper to web-based system.

From: Millie Garrison <millie.garrison@ucr.edu>, Entomology

I wanted to let you know that in general, there is a sense, that this is a good thing. Particularly among our younger travelers, our post docs, our newly hired faculty. The idea of entering their own stuff and be done with it, being able to go in and look at it seems to be positive.

One of the complaints of the old system was people had to fill out the paper form over and over and over again. Once they realize they have kind of a template going and are able to do their travel without having to do repetitive entries with things like their name and stuff. They will be more and more impressed with it.

AND, their reimbursements are very fast - if they choose EFT it is happening the next day after Accounting gets it these funds are getting into their checking account so that is great. …Just wanted to give you that overall feedback.

From: Maggie Kimberly <maggie.kimberly@ucr.edu>, Intercollegiate Athletics

Athletics has had much success with the iTravel program over the past several years. Our coaching staff really appreciates the capability of being able to review and approve their travel when they are away from their offices. Many hotels have internet access available to their guests and the coaches are able to access and review their travel, which in turn speeds the reimbursement payment process.
Some of our coaches really like the history capabilities. They particularly like to review and print copies of receipts if they are needed. This feature also allows them to see if all expenses were in fact reported, especially when there is a receipt they question if they had actually submitted or not.

This year many of our coaches are reviewing through the “Search Engine” the status of their travel summary and the approval status of the summary. Many are beginning to read and understand this process, which in turn help to reduce the number of questions and interruption for me.

I particularly at year end closing like to ease in which all outstanding or pending travel can be reviewed for reporting. This helps to eliminate a forgotten expense or a direct charge that may need to be cleared or reported.

From: Beverly McNeil <beverly.mcneil@ucr.edu>, Mathematics

The benefits of this program are the following:

…That the traveler can start the process and send to the Travel Coordinator. Since the traveler knows the dates and pertinent information, this saves the Travel Coordinator time to process the request. In addition, she can then verify the information and send electronically for final approval and then on to Accounting, without having a paper voucher and receipts traveling through the system.

The ability for the traveler to get their reimbursement electronically, saving them time, as well as again paper being pushed through the system. I have already had comments from the travelers how they appreciate how quickly their reimbursements get processed.

Hope this helps and definitely support this award.

From: Estella Davalos <estella.davalos@ucr.edu>, Entomology

I wanted to give you feedback on how happy I am with iTavel. Submitting travel is quick and easy. The tabs and drop downs that you've created are user friendly and helpful in reminding me what is required from each expense.

A great feature is being able to save a trip as a new trip either for the same traveler or a different one. This works great when we have a group of people going to the same conference or doing field collection on the same dates and locations. It's also helpful when we have mileage for lab personal doing routine checks on experimental sites.

Travelers have the ability to create their own trips with only needing to submit their receipts to me. Scanning the receipts and attaching them takes no time at all. The "Comments" tab is great for the traveler as they can write notes to me. And I can write notes to accounting; this communication has helped in the area of trips being rejected less.
Searching for trips is also quick and easy. You can find anything from the moment the trip was submitted to when it was approved. The best part is "My Trips Routing Location" where you can see exactly where the trip is located at any part of the routing.

Travel Planning is a wonderful asset that I use a lot to keep track of any prepayments I have made for airfare, shuttles, conferences, or lodging.

Great Job!

From: Alexis Talpash <alexis.talpash@ucr.edu>, NPPS Administration

UC Travelers are Smiling!!!

iTravel is a quick and a well planned system that makes the reimbursement process efficient and user friendly to use. I have used iTravel for two years and I'm completely satisfied with its performance.

From: Julie Hull <julie.hull@ucr.edu>, Housing Srves. Admin.

Housing began using iTravel in September of 2006. I believe it is one of the greatest improvements in on line applications that UCR Computing has designed. iTravel is easy to use, easy to train new users and perhaps the best feature is the ease of obtaining approval and attaching documents. The travelers really like the option of EFT reimbursement and that the routing can be tracked on iTravel so they can get an idea of when they will be reimbursed.

The time it takes to complete a travel voucher has been reduced tremendously. I enjoy using iTravel and hope to see more on line applications in the near future. As always, Amber has been a great resource for the departments whenever there is an issue or question and we appreciate all she has done for us.

From: Mary Stuart <mary.stuart@ucr.edu>, CNAS Dean's Office

The iTavel online system has grown by leaps and bounds from its inception, to become a tool that offers flexibility according to the type of travel being reported, as well as improved notifications and therefore a decrease in the time needed for responses and approvals.

The IT team continues to improve the system’s features, based on the needs of its campus customers. For example, they are currently working toward an upgrade in the Search function that will enable users to search by vendor number, as well as by name; also, the soon-to-come travel booking portal will be integrated with iTavel, which will be a wonderful tool for users.

From: Millie Garrison <millie.garrison@ucr.edu>, Entomology

I’ve said it before, and I’ll say it again, “We couldn’t live without iTavel!”
The Entomology department requests more than 600 travel expense reimbursements per year. We have been using iTravel more than three years, initially as one of the early pilot departments. Since switching to iTravel, our processing time has decreased significantly. There are also fewer errors, travelers are able to determine where their requests are in the system, and our policy-required approvals are not only being done, but are being efficiently documented.

Last October one of the department’s two Travel Coordinators went on an unexpected six month leave of absence due to illness. Had we been still processing paper travel vouchers, only one person could not possibly have handled all of the incoming reimbursement requests, especially in December when dozens of our faculty and graduate students attend the annual Entomology Society of America meeting. However, because of iTravel, our remaining Travel Coordinator managed to process all requests with only minimal delays while maintaining her sanity -- and even her sense of humor!

Many thanks to everyone who worked so hard to put out travel planning and expense reporting on the web! “We couldn’t live without iTravel!”

From: Mary Crisucci <mary.crisucci@ucr.edu>, Accounting

I wanted to let you know that I think iTravel is nothing short of miraculous. Converting paper travel vouchers to a web-based system was a daunting undertaking and Computing made it look effortless. I am beginning to think that if we dream it, Computing can build it. Thanks once more for a great product.