

# National Travel Case Study



National Travel, an American Express Travel Agency, working on behalf of a client that was managing the federal assistance efforts for first responders in the aftermath of Hurricane Michael, October 10-12, 2018.

## CHALLENGE

To efficiently survey hotels in 143 counties in two states (GA & AL) for rates and availability for 30-day time periods in October and November of 2018. The client needed to know what hotels had sleeping rooms available for 30-day stays and at what rate; and if not, what dates were available. Replies were required from hotels by October 17, 2018, within two hours of receiving the initial request and just five days of the first landfall. As three out of four hotel requests for proposal are not answered and those that are answered range from a 48 to 72 hour turnaround time, National Travel simply did not have the time to use traditional RFP technology nor the human resources to call each hotel directly – which would mean finding the hotels in each county, contacting them to request the proper contact, compiling all responses and following up on those that had not yet replied.

## OBJECTIVE

To find a solution that could be configured and implemented with less than 24 hours to meet the clients timelines of needing immediate information. The ideal technology would have a database of hotels including current contacts at each hotel, would allow for agency configuration including IATA number and contact information, but would not require training for the National Travel team or hotels prior to use, and would not require their travel agents track the responses.

## SOLUTION

Groupize eBids, allowing planners of extended stays to shop, negotiate and manage bids from over 150,000+ hotels worldwide.

## CASE STUDY

National Travel is ranked among the “Top 25 Travel Management Companies in the United States” according to Business Travel News. National Travel assists corporate entities ranging in size from small, independent businesses to large conglomerates and government agencies. This successful representation of diverse clientele is directly linked to National Travel’s history of providing customers with exceptional care and the utmost attention to detail. One of the government agencies that National Travel supports is in charge of federal assistance efforts for first responders.

On October 10, 2018, Hurricane Michael, the third-most intense hurricane to make landfall in the contiguous United States and the strongest storm on record in the Florida Panhandle made landfall near Mexico Beach, FL. Hurricane Michael moved inland over Georgia and the mid-Atlantic States before moving off-shore on October 12, 2018. Hurricane Michael left six states in need of federal assistance services and three states with emergency declarations, Florida, Georgia and Alabama. The client tasked National Travel with hotel management for the next sixty days in Georgia and Alabama. Immediate reports out of Georgia and Alabama showed almost 1 million people without power and ultimately caused more than \$14.5B of damage in the United States. The emergency was unprecedented and there was no time to spare in securing hotel accommodations for both the displaced and aid workers.

National Travel, an American Express Travel agency, placed a call to their technology partner, Travelport. Their Travelport Account Manager introduced National Travel to Groupize and scheduled a product evaluation for the same day. National Travel conducted their product evaluation and within 72 hours was fully implemented and sending bids to hotels in the affected regions.

Within 48 hours of implementation, National Travel had queried almost 2,000 hotels in 37 different regions of Alabama and Georgia. The first hotel responded within 15 minutes of the first request being sent and hotel responses were not only sent to the travel agency point of contact by email but also captured in the eBids dashboard so that multiple collaborators could assist with the project.

Hotels responded with comprehensive offers including availability, rates (including special rates), amenities and details of how to confirm the bookings. Notably, the Groupize system automatically follows up with all hotels that have not replied within 24 hours and again at 72 hours. The automated follow-ups to hotels that did not respond, removed hours of follow up time from the agency staff.

National Travel was able to contact all hotels within a specified region simply by creating an event in Groupize and associating the local hotels to that event, a task that averages between 5 to 10 minutes per event. If the Groupize technology was not utilized, a travel agent would have to research a region, document all hotels

in that area, create a database of those hotels, call each hotel and request to talk to a sales or general manager, share their requirements verbally, by email or fax. Then, receive responses and match them to the proper hotel and follow up in the same manner with those that had not yet responded. This process could take up to 45 minutes per hotel, time which the client simply did not have as first responders needed to be placed into hotels immediately.

By deploying the Groupize technology, National Travel was able to meet the clients timelines within their business parameters and ultimately get displaced families and first responders into hotel rooms faster.

*“I just wanted to take a moment to thank you and your team for your product and your support over the past few days. The product works very well for us and your team was most helpful and this has been a tremendous asset to assisting the federal government during this recovery effort.”*

**Joe Lambert**

Comptroller and Director of IT Services, National Travel



## Why eBids worked for National Travel:

- ✔ SaaS technology that could be deployed overnight with custom configurations including IATA and rate codes
- ✔ SaaS technology that does not require training for the agency users or the hotel contacts
- ✔ Functionality to request all hotels in a county or even multiple counties at the same time
- ✔ A hotel database with current contact information for the sales manager or general manager
- ✔ E-mail as a response mechanism for hotels, allowing them to meet the requested two hour turnaround time
- ✔ Automation that would track hotels that did not respond and automatically send a follow-up request at 24 and 72 hours
- ✔ A dashboard that has captured all communications between agency and hotel, creating a comprehensive audit trail
- ✔ Affordable technology providing an impressive ROI with time savings

### RESULTS

National Travel was able to provide accurate and up to date hotel inventory in Georgia and Alabama within 5 days of the storm. National Travel was able to efficiently source and manage hotel responses throughout October and November of 2018, ultimately putting both first responders and displaced individuals in hotel rooms faster. Groupize estimates that National Travel saved 1500 hours of staff time which allowed them to meet the urgent requirements of the first responders.



5 days

Hotel Inventory for  
Georgia and Alabama  
to be Completed



1.500

Hours of Staff  
Work Saved

### FUTURE SUCCESSES

National Travel, with their in-depth understanding of eBids, will evaluate how to use the Groupize Instant Booking, Event Booking Pages and attendee management to drive even better practices for future emergency events.