

— THE MANAGED HOTEL PROGRAM STUDY · SECOND EDITION

The Evolution of Managed Hotel Programs

Balancing cost, traveler experience and technology in a changing
sourcing landscape.

Grounded in a survey of **258 corporate travel managers** across North America &
EMEA.

Shaping the future of managed hotel programs, together

For the second year in a row, GBTA and Radisson Hotel Group have partnered to explore the trends shaping hotel program management, examining how travel buyers manage spend, negotiate rates, evaluate partners and prepare for future sourcing cycles.



Gianni Di Fede

Global Chief Commercial Officer
Radisson Hotel Group



The future of managed hotel programs will be defined by flexibility, intelligence and stronger collaboration. Through our ongoing partnership with GBTA, this research provides a valuable pulse check on how travel buyers are adapting to changing market dynamics, from AI adoption and agile sourcing to rising traveler expectations. These insights help both buyers and suppliers make more informed decisions and build programs that deliver long-term value.



Suzanne Neufang

Chief Executive Officer
Global Business Travel Association



This timely research, made possible through our partnership with Radisson Hotel Group, provides data-driven insights into how managed hotel programs are evolving in an increasingly complex global environment. It highlights the shifting priorities, challenges and opportunities facing travel managers today, from rising costs to the rapidly growing role of AI. Above all, it offers practical guidance to help the business travel community adapt, innovate and drive stronger, more resilient travel programs.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Four strategic shifts are reshaping how programs are sourced

\$461_{bn}

Annual global business-travel lodging spend, the single largest category of managed travel expenditure.

Source: GBTA Business Travel Index

Managed hotel programs continue to evolve in response to changing market conditions, shifting traveler expectations and rapid advances in technology. Accommodation represents a significant share of managed travel spend, making effective hotel program management more important than ever.

This white paper is designed to help buyers optimize program governance and traveler engagement, benchmark their programs against market trends, and make more informed sourcing decisions. It focuses on four strategic shifts reshaping the future of managed hotel programs.

01 The Rise of Agile Sourcing

Fixed rates remain the foundation, but dynamic pricing is gaining momentum. The question is no longer whether dynamic discounts belong in managed programs, but where they create the greatest value and where fixed-rate agreements remain essential.

03 AI Moves Beyond Experimentation

AI is becoming an operational reality for travel buyers, who are exploring how it can support research, analysis and decision-making, although significant concerns remain around trust, transparency and human oversight.

02 Traveler Experience Takes Center Stage

Traveler experience has evolved into a strategic program objective. As organizations seek to improve program adoption and compliance, traveler satisfaction, wellbeing and safety are playing an increasingly important role in sourcing decisions.

04 Trusted Partnerships Become Critical

As programs become more sophisticated and technology plays a greater role, collaboration, trust and transparency between buyers, suppliers and service providers is becoming more important than ever to deliver long-term program value.

METHODOLOGY

Research conducted by GBTA in partnership with Radisson Hotel Group between **20 April and 13 May 2026**. **258 travel managers** from North America and Europe participated, representing organizations of varying size, industry and reach.

NORAM · 168

EMEA · 90

COMPANY SIZE

5,000 or fewer 36%

5,001–20,000 34%

More than 20,000 30%

COMPANY REACH

60%

23%

17%

Global Multinational National

Topic 01

RFP Evolution

Rate stability has held for years and handed buyers real leverage but the conditions that produced it are now under pressure from agile sourcing, diverging regional markets and a rethink of the RFP itself.

IN THIS SECTION

The rise of agile sourcing · the impact of geography · the evolution of program management · and whether we still need the RFP in its current form.



The Rise of Agile Sourcing Strategies

The debate is no longer fixed rates versus dynamic pricing. Buyers are increasingly building flexible programs that combine both approaches.

Fixed negotiated rates remain the foundation of most managed hotel programs, but the research shows that buyers are embracing more flexible sourcing strategies combining different rate types and contracting models.

Dynamic pricing continues to gain momentum, particularly in EMEA, where buyers appear more willing to experiment with alternative sourcing approaches. The shift is also more pronounced among larger organizations, which are reporting stronger growth in dynamic discounts alongside relative consolidation of traditional fixed-rate programs.

The blended approach

Taking a more balanced approach with both fixed and dynamic rates can offer a range of benefits. Dynamic discounts can provide access to savings in markets where travel volumes may not justify fixed-rate negotiations, while expanding hotel coverage and increasing traveler choice. Fixed rates, meanwhile, continue to offer predictability, budget certainty and protection in high-demand markets.

 **Greater coverage**
Discounts on more stays across more markets.

 **Fills volume gaps**
Dynamic qualifies cities where fixed rates can't.

 **Hedges demand swings**
Fixed wins tight markets; dynamic the softer ones.

 **More traveler choice**
A broader set of preferred properties for employees.

90%

of large programs combine fixed rates and dynamic discounts (76% across all programs).

36%

of programs' accepted hotels are on **NLRA** (non-last-room-availability) rates.

Change in the most recent sourcing / RFP cycle



Dynamic discounts · property level

49% MORE

6% FEWER

GROWING



Fixed rates

17% MORE

25% FEWER

EASING

Q. Compared to one year ago, does your travel program have more or fewer of the following today?
Buyers were only asked about rates their company has in place. n = 140–172.

Balancing Flexibility and Coverage

While LRA agreements remain more common overall, buyers are increasingly recognizing the role different rate structures can play within a balanced hotel program.

Many programs are using a combination of LRA and NLRA agreements, reflecting the different advantages each can offer depending on program objectives, market conditions and traveler needs.

LRA agreements continue to provide inventory assurance and rate access, while NLRA agreements can offer pricing advantages and additional flexibility in some markets. The appropriate balance will vary by organization and sourcing strategy.

Despite the increasing use of different rate structures, company-negotiated rate coverage has remained largely unchanged from the previous year's survey. This suggests that expanding coverage depends on a range of factors beyond rate structure alone.

Organizations must carefully balance cost savings, inventory availability and traveler experience. The most successful programs will be those that align rate structures with program objectives, supported through trusted partnerships built on transparency and a clear focus on traveler needs.

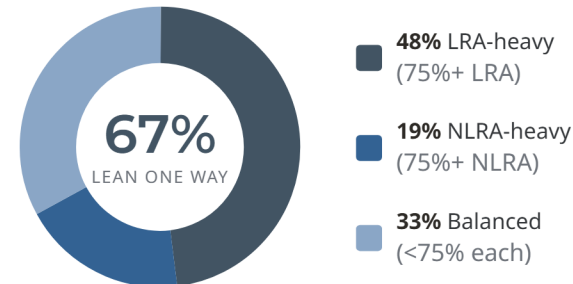


KEY INSIGHT

Two-thirds of programs lean decisively one way, yet the share of bookings at negotiated rates hasn't moved since last year, underlining how hard true rate coverage is to grow.

How programs tilt: LRA vs NLRA

67% of programs lean decisively one way

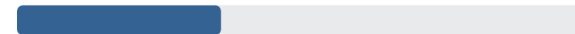


Average fixed-rate split*

LRA — Last Room Availability **62%**



NLRA — Non-Last Room Availability **36%**



* Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding and/or 'Other' responses.



72%

of programs have **at least one chain-wide discount**, largely unchanged from last year.

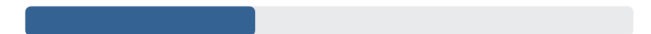
Rate coverage: no progress vs last year

Share of hotel bookings by rate type

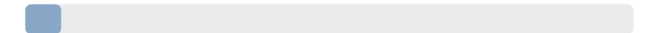
Company-negotiated rates — exclusive to us (ratio identical to last year) **57%**



Non-negotiated rates — public / TMC / consortia / chain-wide **38%**

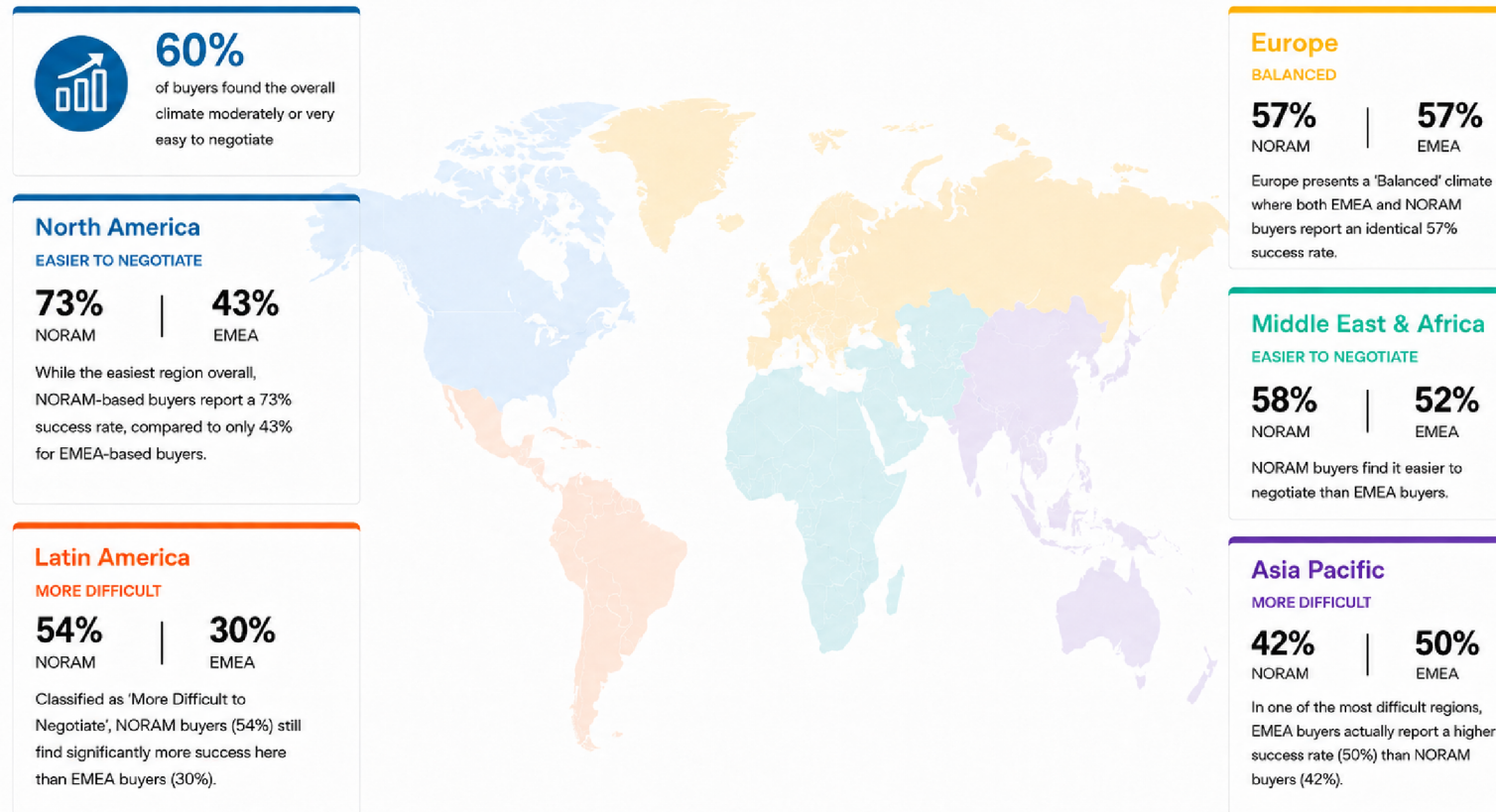


Other **6%**



The Impact of Geography on Hotel Sourcing

Hotel sourcing remains favorable overall, but regional differences are creating increasingly varied negotiation climates for travel buyers.



% rating it easy (7+/10) to obtain favorable rates, split by where the buyer is based. *Small sample for EMEA buyers in Latin America & the Middle East.

NEGOTIATION CLIMATE

Confidence is highest close to home

Hotel programs have enjoyed a multi-year period of relative stability. While occupancy and rates have varied across regions, increases have generally remained in the low single digits across many key business travel markets. This has resulted in a largely favorable negotiation climate for corporate buyers. However, the research reveals significant regional differences, with conditions generally more challenging across EMEA than North America.

Buyers consistently report greater confidence sourcing within their home regions, with perceived complexity increasing as sourcing moves further away from core markets. North American buyers report relatively high confidence sourcing in Europe, while European buyers appear less comfortable negotiating in North America than in APAC or the Middle East.

These findings highlight the importance of understanding local market dynamics and adapting sourcing strategies accordingly. Organizations that combine strong supplier partnerships with market intelligence and regional expertise will navigate complex sourcing environments more effectively.

The Evolution of Program Management

The future of hotel program management is increasingly collaborative, rather than fully in-house or fully outsourced.

54%

of all managed hotel programs are now **outsourced to some degree**, yet **partial outsourcing is the default**. Full handover stays rare, even among the largest programs.

While strategic ownership of hotel programs remains largely in-house, many organizations are increasingly outsourcing selected elements of program management. Buyers are becoming more selective about which activities are retained internally and where external expertise can add value. Adoption of outsourcing rises significantly with company size, reflecting the growing complexity of global travel programs.

The Rise of the Hybrid Model

Outsourcing is less about relinquishing control and more about accessing specialist expertise, additional resources and local market knowledge. It can also provide greater agility, allowing organizations to scale support up or down as requirements change. At the same time, organizations continue to recognize that no external partner understands their business objectives as well as they do themselves, making internal ownership of strategy and decision-making essential.



KEY INSIGHT

The question is no longer fully in-house or outsourced it's finding the optimal balance between internal ownership and external expertise to drive better outcomes, greater agility and stronger performance.

The larger the program, the more it outsources

% of programs outsourced to some degree, by company size

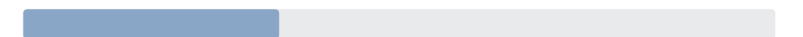
More than 20,000 employees **78%**



5,001–20,000 employees **58%**



5,000 or fewer employees **34%**



How programs split overall



■ Fully in-house ■ Mostly in-house ■ Partial / hybrid
■ Mostly / fully outsourced

Do We Still Need the RFP in its Current Form?

The opportunity is not simply to make the existing RFP process faster, but to rethink how hotel sourcing creates value.

Despite years of discussion around improving efficiency, the annual hotel RFP process continues to be viewed by many buyers and suppliers as **resource-intensive and administrative**, with some questioning whether it remains **fit for purpose** in its current form.

There is growing demand for greater **consistency and standardization** across hotel chains, platforms and especially data formats. While technology, AI and automation can reduce manual effort, respondents appear to be looking for **more than digitization**.

The strongest responses suggest buyers are looking beyond process efficiency toward **alternative sourcing approaches** that deliver greater value, flexibility and agility, delegating administration to specialist partners so internal teams can **focus on strategy and program performance**.



THE SHIFT

The future of hotel sourcing is unlikely to be defined by faster RFPs alone, but by rethinking how sourcing creates value leveraging technology, AI, specialist expertise and more flexible models.



OPTION 01

Fixed

The annual bid

- One cycle a year, static negotiated rates
- Volume-for-discount logic
- Set, then largely unmanaged

OPTION 02

Blended

Fixed + dynamic

- Negotiated rates on core hotels
- Dynamic % discount on the long tail
- The pragmatic majority sit here

OPTION 03

Continuous

Always-on sourcing

- Rolling reviews, not a single event
- Rates adjusted as the market shifts
- Tech & data make it manageable
- Include project accommodation discussions

Rethinking the Annual RFP

Companies are open-minded about new approaches that can streamline negotiations. The emergence of concepts such as continuous sourcing highlights how organizations are rethinking the role of the annual RFP, the goal is not simply to automate existing processes, but to use technology and AI to support better decision-making.



Carry forward standard terms

Roll over standard responses, amenities and contract terms year to year, negotiating only rates and material changes.



Standardize formats & platforms

Consistency across chains, platforms and data formats reduces the number of required questions and manual effort.



Consider continuous sourcing

Keep contracts in place longer, triggering renegotiation primarily when market conditions change significantly. Consider multi-year agreements.



Free teams to focus on strategy

Reduce administrative effort so travel managers focus on partnerships, performance and long-term value.



Standardizing hotel response templates, **reducing the number of required questions**, and using a **single platform** to collect and compare bids would significantly cut down the time involved.

TRAVEL BUYER · NORTH AMERICA

Topic 02

Traveler Experience Moves Center Stage

Traveler experience is no longer simply an outcome of a successful travel program. It is a strategic objective in its own right and a growing driver of program adoption and compliance.

IN THIS SECTION

The strategic balance of buyer priorities · the new balance of cost, experience, safety and sustainability · and what it means for how hotels are chosen.



The Rise of Traveler Experience as a Strategic Priority

Traveler experience is no longer simply an outcome of a successful travel program. It is a strategic objective in its own right.



WHY IT MATTERS

Balance drives compliance. Programs that balance savings with employee needs and safety drive higher adoption and in-policy booking, and the "right mix" creates program value that exceeds the impact of lower preferred rates alone.

Buyers allocated 100 points across priorities when conducting hotel RFPs.
n = 171

The New Balance of Travel Program Priorities

While cost unsurprisingly remains the primary driver of hotel sourcing decisions, the research suggests traveler experience has emerged as one of the most important considerations shaping managed hotel programs in 2026.

Organizations are increasingly recognizing the connection between traveler satisfaction, wellbeing and overall program effectiveness. This shift reflects a broader evolution in the role of corporate travel. Travel buyers are no longer focused solely on securing the lowest available rates. Instead, they are balancing commercial objectives with the need to support employee wellbeing, productivity and engagement while travelling.

The findings also suggest that traveler experience is becoming an important driver of program adoption and compliance. When preferred hotels meet traveler needs and expectations, employees are more likely to book within policy, helping organizations achieve both commercial and operational objectives.

Rethinking Hotel Choice

For travel buyers, this creates an opportunity to think differently about hotel selection. While established brands and long-standing supplier relationships continue to play an important role, organizations may also benefit from exploring new properties and alternative options that better align with evolving traveler expectations. In some cases, introducing new hotels can help address program gaps, improve traveler satisfaction and strengthen overall program performance.



THE RESULT

A more balanced approach to hotel sourcing, where **cost, traveler experience, safety, sustainability and program performance** are increasingly viewed as interconnected elements of a successful travel program.

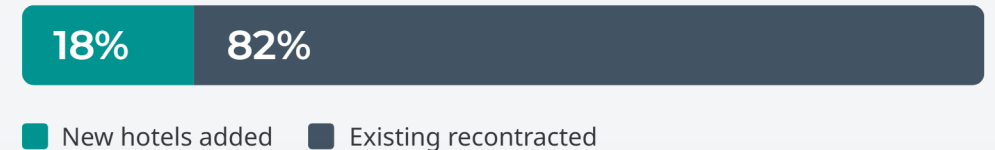


Radisson RED Madrid

Optimizing Program Growth

Hotel chains keep expanding their footprints, creating more choice, but a new hotel's success depends on how well it supports traveler needs and integrates into the wider program. Buyers stay selective about what they add.

PREFERRED-HOTEL TURNOVER EACH CYCLE





Sustainability Becomes a Baseline Expectation

Sustainability hasn't lost importance, it has become a given. Buyers now ask not *whether* a hotel is sustainable, but whether it can prove it.

In this year's research, sustainability appears less prominent as a *standalone* scoring priority. Rather than signalling decline, this reflects a shift: it is increasingly treated as a **baseline expectation**, embedded within supplier selection and RFP qualification rather than weighed as a separate line item. Credible environmental credentials are now a **pre-condition to participate**, not a differentiator that earns extra points.



Verified carbon data

Emissions measured and disclosed at property level.



SBTi-aligned targets

Science-based reduction goals, not vague pledges.



Transparent reporting

Consistent, comparable data across the portfolio.



WHAT IT MEANS FOR SOURCING

Suppliers who can evidence their performance clear the bar automatically; those who can't are increasingly screened out before scoring even begins.

Topic 03

AI in Hotel RFPs

The data reveals that travel buyers are simultaneously enthusiastic, inexperienced, and worried about AI, all at once.

IN THIS SECTION

From experimentation to implementation · the ambition gap among non-users · the AI paradox and the human advantage · and the managed hotel program of tomorrow.



AI: From Experimentation to Implementation

Whether AI has a role in hotel sourcing is no longer the question — it is already being implemented, and adoption is expected to rise sharply in the upcoming cycle.

While just **8%** of respondents reported using AI a moderate amount or a lot in their most recent hotel RFP cycle, **39%** expect to do so in the upcoming cycle, with a further **30%** expecting to use it a little bit. This points to a market moving rapidly towards adoption. The findings also reveal high levels of comfort with AI for both decision support and automation with limited human intervention.

This level of comfort is striking given the relatively early stage of adoption and suggests ambitions for AI may be evolving more rapidly than practical experience, with buyers already looking beyond basic automation and administrative support toward more strategic and decision-oriented applications.

Regional and organizational differences are also beginning to emerge. EMEA-based buyers appear to be ahead of their North American counterparts, while larger, more global organizations are generally more comfortable with AI-assisted sourcing, potentially reflecting greater program complexity, larger data sets and stronger internal technology capabilities.



KEY INSIGHT

The single largest paradox in the data: a market flipping from near-zero AI adoption to a clear majority in just one sourcing cycle.



used **no AI at all** in their most recent hotel RFP cycle

TODAY



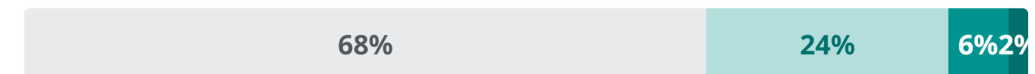
expect to **use AI** in the upcoming sourcing cycle

NEXT CYCLE

Use of AI in the hotel sourcing / RFP cycle

Most recent cycle

just 8% used it a moderate amount or more



Upcoming cycle

69% expect to use AI, a 37-point leap



Not at all
 A little
 A moderate amount
 A lot

Getting Started with AI in Hotel Sourcing

A phased approach to AI adoption, building confidence and governance before handing over judgment.

1 Research & Insights

LOWEST RISK

Start by using AI to support research, market analysis and data gathering. These lower-risk applications can help travel buyers save time while building confidence in AI-generated outputs.

2 Decision Support

HUMAN IN THE LOOP

Expand AI's role into identifying sourcing opportunities, analyzing RFP responses and providing recommendations. Human oversight remains essential, but AI can surface insights and support more informed decision-making.

3 Selective Automation

GOVERNED

Once confidence, governance and processes are established, begin automating specific tasks, such as flagging non-competitive bids or routing routine decisions. Human judgment stays central to strategic sourcing.

💡 KEY PRINCIPLE

Focus on **augmentation before automation**. The most successful AI strategies will combine the efficiency of technology with the judgment of human expertise, adding capacity, not removing accountability.

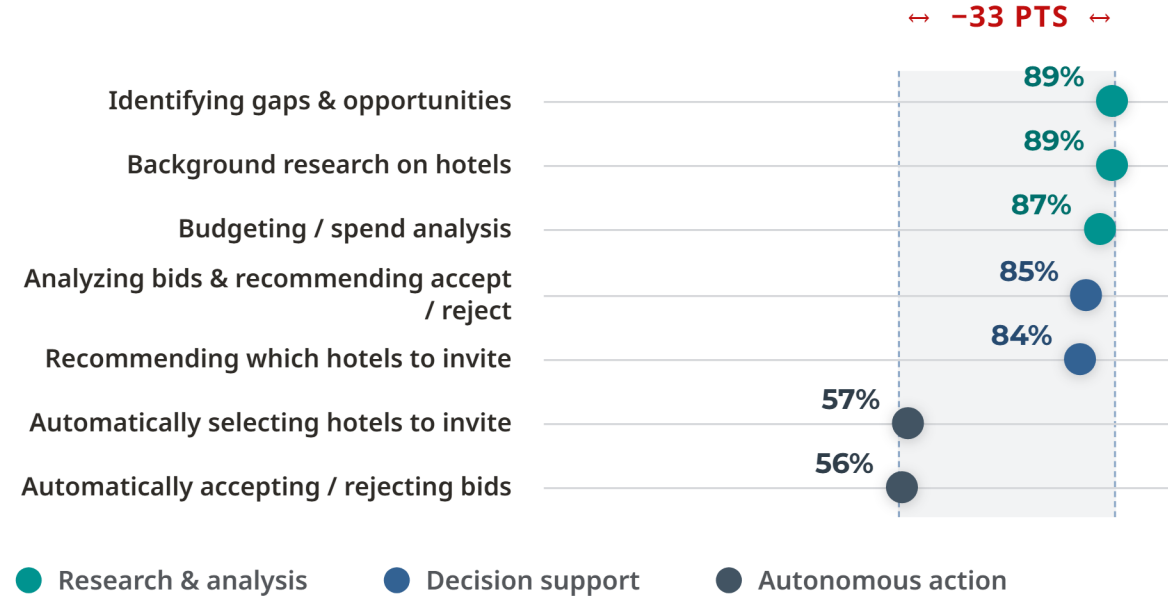


The Ambition Gap

Interest in future AI applications among respondents **not currently using AI**. The order tells the story, appetite stays high even for tasks traditionally reliant on human judgement.

Ranked appetite, with the autonomy gap shaded

Full 0–100 axis. The empty band makes the –32-point cliff impossible to miss.



WHAT THE DATA SAYS

Ambition ahead of experience

This explores interest in a range of AI applications among respondents who are not currently using AI. One of the most surprising findings is the level of interest in applications that move **beyond research and administration** into areas traditionally reliant on human judgement.

Respondents expressed interest in using AI to recommend hotels, evaluate bids and support sourcing decisions, suggesting the conversation is rapidly shifting from efficiency gains toward **decision support and automation**. As discussed previously, buyer ambitions for AI may be running ahead of practical experience.

Yet as the next page explores, buyers also remain mindful of AI's limitations and the continued importance of human oversight.

The AI Paradox

Travel buyers are keen to explore the benefits of AI, yet they also recognize that many of the most important aspects of program management remain deeply human.

The most commonly cited limitations relate to judgement, particularly balancing trade-offs between cost, compliance and traveler experience, and understanding traveler needs and preferences.

Top limitations of AI for hotel sourcing

% citing each limitation · n=175 · the order tells an important story

Assessing trade-offs: cost vs. compliance vs. experience	62%
Understanding traveler needs & preferences	60%
Limited integration with RFP tools, TMCs & systems	55%
Capturing organizational priorities & constraints	53%
Lack of transparency in how recommendations are generated	51%
Data privacy & confidentiality concerns	49%

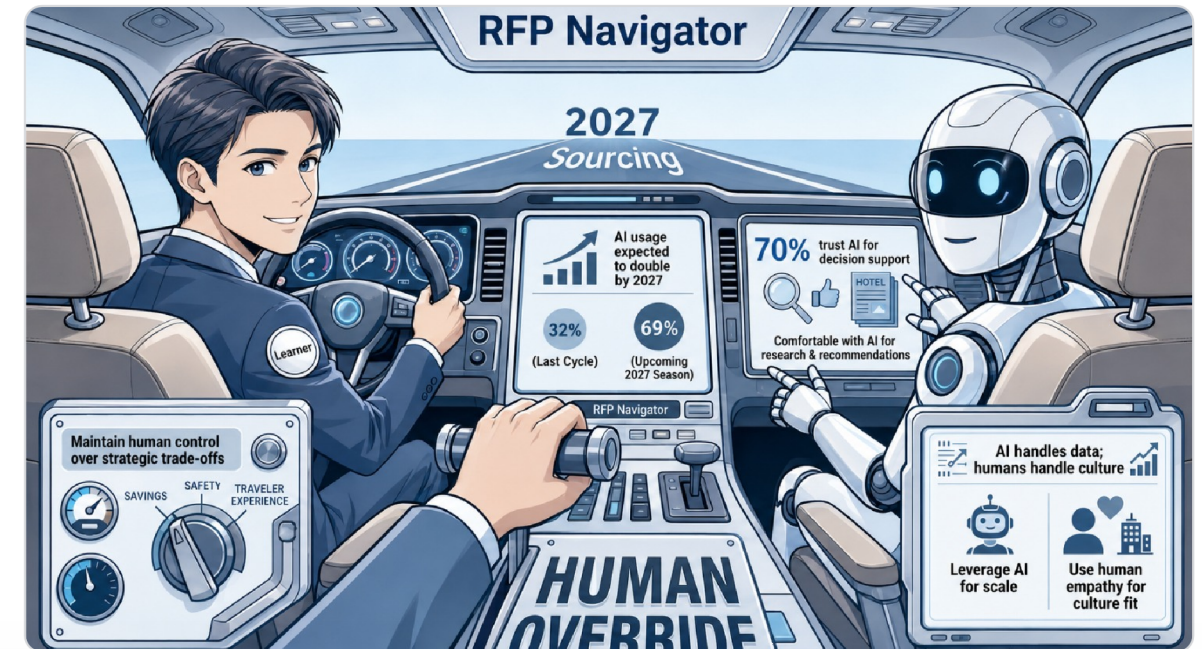


THE TAKEAWAY

AI proposes; people decide. The technology augments analysis, but prioritization between competing program goals stays with the travel manager.

The Human Advantage

While AI can help evaluate options and identify patterns, determining how competing priorities should be balanced remains a **human responsibility**. As adoption accelerates, organizations will need to identify where automation creates value and where human oversight remains essential. The role of travel managers is likely to become increasingly strategic, with greater emphasis on relationships, decision-making and long-term program performance.



The Managed Hotel Program of Tomorrow

The managed hotel programs of tomorrow will be more flexible, more traveler-centric, more intelligent and more collaborative, combining technology, human expertise and trusted partnerships to deliver long-term value.



THE PARTNERSHIP IMPERATIVE

Why collaboration is becoming the cornerstone

As organizations embrace AI, dynamic pricing, global sourcing and increasingly complex travel ecosystems, travel managers must balance cost control, traveler experience, compliance, sustainability and business objectives simultaneously. In this environment, the quality of partnerships is becoming a critical determinant of program success.

Buyers, suppliers and travel management companies must work together more closely than ever supported by transparent communication, meaningful data sharing and a foundation of mutual trust. This is particularly important when navigating non-LRA agreements, dynamic discounts, AI-driven decision-making and outsourced management.

The strongest outcomes will be achieved by organizations that view suppliers as **strategic collaborators rather than transactional vendors**. The future of managed travel will be defined not only by technology and data, but by the strength of the relationships that support them.

Flexible, Human, Intelligent, your playbook for the next RFP cycle.

ABOUT RADISSON HOTEL GROUP

Radisson Hotel Group is an international and dynamic hotel group with ten distinctive brands and more than **1,613 hotels** in operation and under development across EMEA and APAC. Our long-term vision is to be the company of choice for guests, owners and talent. Guided by our “**Yes I Can!**” service culture, we deliver meaningful hospitality experiences while creating long-term value for our partners across corporate travel, meetings and events.

ABOUT GBTA

The Global Business Travel Association (GBTA) is the world’s premier business travel and meetings trade organization headquartered in the Washington, D.C. area serving stakeholders across six continents. GBTA and its **9,000+ members** represent and advocate for the **\$1.69 trillion** global business travel and meetings industry. GBTA and the GBTA Foundation deliver world-class education, events, research, advocacy, and media to a growing global network of more than **28,000 travel professionals** and 125,000 active contacts. For more information, visit [GBTA.org](https://www.gbta.org) and [GBTAFoundation.org](https://www.gbtafoundation.org).

IN PARTNERSHIP



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