

Less Hassle For Youth Soccer Team Travel By: Diane Scavuzzo - Soccer News

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Running Around the Country with TeamRunner - A Simpler Way to Book Travel

What would happen if soccer travel used technology to create a powerful and integrated online solution to connect athletes, teams, sports organizations with hotels and restaurants? That is exactly what Ziad Tleimat wanted to discover. Here is a look at a new, streamlined team-travel solution that offers to simplify the old fashioned and time consuming way of booking team travel.

Competitive soccer is an exciting world filled with regional and national tournaments and youth competitions all across the country and while youth soccer players love playing the game, parents are often overwhelmed by the travel. The problem with youth sports travel is getting team accommodations at an affordable rate at a hotel near your desired location -- without spending a lot of time asking for rates from various hotels and trying to get discounts. Add organizing a team dinner and many team managers as well as soccer parents cringe in frustration at the thought of another soccer trip.

With an entrepreneurial drive and a background in technology, former soccer coach **Ziad Tleimat** created **TeamRunner** – a new web-based solution for organizing travel while trotting around the country competing on the soccer field. Instead of calling various hotels to get prices and book accommodations, TeamRunner lets teams bid for hotel rates and restaurant reservations with just a few clicks.

"The goal was to eliminate many of the hassles as well as to lower the expenses involved in youth sports travel," said Tleimat, founder and president of Zimcode, Inc. who realized the enormous opportunity for improvement in the sports travel market. The idea was to revolutionize how soccer parents book their trips by simplifying the process using modern technology. "My goal is to alleviate the pain from team travel," said Tleimat.

Understanding the burden of team travel usually falls on a parent who is volunteering, Tleimat said, " We want the team manager or the travel coordinator to be able to book all the team travel and food without a lot work - we wanted to offer a solution that is seamless and easy." With over 100 hotel participating and now offering restaurants for team meals, the site solves many travel issues. TeamRunner is also available in both English and Spanish to help meet the needs of today's youth soccer teams.

How does it really work? Teams register and send requests for competitive bids to hotels and restaurants automatically so the team manager does not have to call each hotel and request a block of rooms and inquire for available discounts.

“We do not charge to use TeamRunner and we guarantee the lowest hotel rates available for that time period. We know people do not want hidden costs or surprises when they travel so we usually package the hotel rates to include parking, breakfast and internet,” said Tleimat. “And, travelers can still enjoy the benefit of earning their hotel reward points for their stay.”

In the highly competitive world of elite youth soccer tournaments and showcases, stay-to-play has become the new norm. Stay-to-play requires teams competing in an event to book hotel accommodations through pre-selected hotels. The soccer tournament receives a percentage of all the hotel revenue booked by the players attending the tournament. This hotel commission has become a big source of revenue for tournaments, yet the problem usually is how to track all these thousands of hotel nights.

TeamRunner is also paid through hotel commissions and since all the group travel is painlessly tracked by the integrated software, all the revenue is easily accountable. As it can be difficult for the hotel to track all the parents' reservations, TeamRunner can significantly increase the earnings for the tournaments while providing straightforward transparency.

Bob Turner, TeamRunner's Business Development Manager for the West Region believes soccer tournaments can make more money while making the lives of the soccer parents easier.

"California's Cerritos Memorial Challenge Cup is considered one of the largest youth soccer tournaments hosting over 600 competitive teams, most of whom travel from out of state to participate. Cerritos tested out TeamRunner this year and were really surprised by the higher hotel earnings." Turner, who knows the industry well, is also the President of San Diego's Presidio Soccer League which has over 18,000 registered youth soccer players.

What do the Tournament Directors think of TeamRunner? "It was great and made life so much easier," said **Alex Camargo**, Tournament Director of Cerritos Memorial Challenge Cup. "We recommend TeamRunner to other tournaments who want to make their life simpler and not have to worry about tracking hotel revenue."

"This was our first year using TeamRunner and we have been completely satisfied. Our revenue from hotels increased and we had less work to do," said **Walter Camargo**, Co-Tournament Director of Cerritos Memorial Challenge Cup.

What do the hotels think of TeamRunner? According to **Teresa Karcher**, Sales Manager at the **DoubleTree by Hilton** Santa Ana-Orange County Airport, TeamRunner has the most sophisticated reporting tools on the market as well. "Every user at each level (tournament director, team manager, parent, hotel sales manager,) has his or her own dashboard where they can monitor in real-time all activities and data, related to their role," said Karcher.

Jocelyn Pajarito, Regional Director of Sales and Marketing - **Win Time Hotels** said, "This is the first year the **Holiday Inn San Diego Miramar** and **Holiday Inn Express Rancho Bernardo** worked with a third party site for a sports tournament. I was very pessimistic in the beginning, but found out that it is not complicated at all. TeamRunner's staff is very easy to work with and they make things happen. We look forward to working with TeamRunner again next year, and hope to have a stronger alliance with them."

What does the future hold for TeamRunner? Looking to offer all teams more than just hotels and restaurant options, TeamRunner wants to expand it's booking options to include more team bonding activities and local attractions. "Tournaments only have one champion and one finalist, other teams are eliminated," said Turner. "Often players are left with nothing to do but run around the hotel. Why not have a way to chose some great team bonding activities if your team is out of the competition?" asks Turner.

"Our mission for TeamRunner is to ultimately develop into a one-stop shop for all team travel related needs. We will continue to expand and enhance our system based on feedback and prioritize development based on real needs. Our primary objective is to work with our partners to add more services. This will increase revenue streams for our partners and our ability to provide more scholarship dollars to soccer organizations for their athletes," said **Colette Kuhnsman**, VP Marketing - TeamRunner.

"TeamRunner also believes in giving back to the community. TeamRunner provides five percent of its net revenue to local sports organizations creating scholarships that support athletes who otherwise might not have the means to participate in youth sports. Interested non-profit organizations can request information on grants," said Tleimat.

While no solution meets all needs perfectly, maybe the future of youth sports travel just got a little brighter. After all, their message is "Teams Need To Travel - TeamRunner Makes It Simple." <http://www.soccernation.com/less-hassle-for-soccer-team-travel--cms-6121>