



Guilt Trips: Going Green With Rearden Commerce

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John Davies, Mickey North Rizza

A recent cover story in *San Francisco* magazine entitled "Green with Worry" describes how Bay Area residents are becoming eco-neurotic, ending up in therapy as they confront spouses about recycling habits or worry about driving to hike in Muir Woods. It should come as no surprise that the greenest state in the nation would also lead in feeling like they haven't done enough. In fact, we have been following this trend (see "Knowledge and Power") and identified the attitude-and-behavior gap where consumers say they are getting greener, but their actions tell a different story. Looking on the bright side, however, many of these studies document that when consumers are presented with information that helps them understand the cost and impact of their actions, they will change their behaviors.

Managing what you measure with visual guilt

We recently spoke with Dan Ford, **Rearden Commerce's** VP of product marketing, about a new green feature the company is launching for its web-based digital personal assistant. Rearden provides an on-demand productivity tool that acts like a combination of a great administrative assistant, concierge, and personal shopper all rolled into one. As noted by Mickey North-Rizza (see "American Express Business Travel Takes Rearden Commerce Under Its Wing"), the Rearden Commerce Network provides a web-based shopping mall for travel services that range from air, car, hotel, and ground transportation, to dining and entertainment, to online meetings, and even small-package shipment services.

Over the past year, the company has added hundreds of corporate customers, from the Fortune 100 to small businesses, all of which use the technology to help their employees make intelligent purchasing decisions. During our call, Mr. Ford introduced the concept of visual guilt.

Back in 2006, a *Wall Street Journal* article noted that travel management companies discovered people will opt for cheaper choices than corporate travel agents or administrative assistants would book simply because they see lower prices on an online booking screen. This is the effect of visual guilt.

Now, when you book your travel through the Rearden Commerce Network, a "Did You Know" question is displayed, such as "Did you know your flight will emit approximately 1,784 pounds of CO2 into the atmosphere?" The site will also prompt you to determine if you would like an eco-friendly alternative, such as a web conference. If you decide to skip your trip, the greenhouse gas savings associated with your choice is displayed as well. The effect is a roll up of green savings by employee, department, and company.

New choices are only the start

While it's not likely to provide the foundation for a frequent-not-flying program, this new initiative has potential. Mr. Ford described several new companies and services that users might be interested in that they wouldn't discover if they're not looking for green options. One of those is **PlanetTran**, the country's first public limousine service to exclusively utilize ultra fuel-efficient hybrid vehicles. There are probably other services as well (such as green restaurants or event coordinators) that might get better placement on the procurement site for companies that value greener criteria.

One of the more interesting possibilities for Rearden Commerce is the ability to report against a database of travel by a company's employees. Under the guidelines developed by the World Resources Institute, in conjunction with the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, Scope 3 indirect emissions (including those associated with "transport-related activities in vehicles not owned or controlled by the reporting company") could be consolidated for green reporting by your personal digital assistant and rolled up for a corporate emissions footprint. Once they've gathered all that data for you, maybe they'll send an e-mail to your BlackBerry and tell you to turn off the lights before you leave the office.