



Toolie's Business Travel Newsletter

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Toolie's Travel Plans

Hurricane Dennis made it impossible to take any saleable photographs when I was in Atlanta this month, so I will be returning in early fall to get photos for that guide. My involvement with the National Speakers Association Northwest Chapter has escalated; I've been named President-Elect. This is the beginning of a three-year term that will provide a nice foundation for integrating speaking into my travel business.

I'm writing to you from Philadelphia, PA, where I've just finished photographing a Christian conference. I bought a new 70-200 millimeter lens that allowed me to take discreet but up-close photos of the speakers. I'm considering adding "conference photographer" to my list of available services, but I've got to start working with barbells because the new lens turns my 5-pound camera into an almost 9-pound camera. Yikes!

The rest of the year's travel has not been confirmed, but I know it's going to be a busy one. Stay tuned for a list of the dates and cities I will be visiting. If you see your city on the list, please let me know. I'm always looking for YOUR recommendations for things to cover in my travel guide for that city.

This Month's Travel Tip: Turning Waiting Time into Learning Time

In the past year's worth of newsletters, I've laid out what I believe to be the business traveler's principles for low-hassle, productive travel. For the next few months, I'm going to give you specific ideas for turning travel time into "up-time" by using technology to reclaim the minutes and hours we spend in transit.

Using Up Those Odd Bits of Time

It's funny how life keeps handing to you over and over again the essential lessons of living until you finally learn them. I was a good student in school; I learned things fairly easily, but when it came to practicing a skill such as playing the piano, I would get bored and not really perfect anything, despite the protestations of my teachers.

When I started working for Microsoft and began writing and testing software, I did so in a situation where I didn't get a lot of on-the-job help. Consequently, to avoid losing my job, I had to learn to (as my mother would say) "sit still" and keep working on a problem until I had solved it on my own. It was an excruciating lesson to learn, but I did finally get to the point where I could eliminate all the distractions and concentrate on one complex problem until I had it figured out. I would frequently stay late and work anywhere from 4-8 hours on a single task, a feat my mother would never have believed that I could manage.

Now, what does this have to do with business travel? Well, I think that we suffer from the idea that we have to have a long block of time at once in order to "get something done" and feel like we're being productive. The challenge for us is to organize ourselves a bit more and have handy a list of things to do that can fill up odd bits of time. I can't say that I have perfected this skill, but I have some ideas of things you can do.

Organize, Organize, Organize

If memory serves I've used at least 6 different methods in the last 15 years to organize myself and keep track of what I need to accomplish. Most recently, I have experimented with the Task and tracking features of both Outlook and Microsoft Project. I've even taken a class on using Outlook to organize oneself, and I still use many of those principles today. I do have the ability to "work from the end result" and imagine all the steps in between, and for that I use Project. For most people though, working in Project to track their "Things to Do" list is overkill; more overhead than accomplishment.

I confess that when I start a new guide or a new information product, I will often turn to one of these programs to help get things out of my brain and in front of my eyes. On more than one occasion I have been alarmed at the total number of tasks I have to do -- a discovery I made by entering them into one or both programs. Still, it's more stressful to be walking around with your To-Do list in your head, for fear that you'll forget something important.

Oddly enough, I still find that making lists on paper is the most satisfying approach for me. I keep a small spiral-bound notebook that has a thick cardboard cover with me at all times, and in those miscellaneous moments during travel, I will make list after list after list in that notebook. Even when I'm in town, I will sometimes take myself out to lunch when I'm feeling

overwhelmed, and I'll sit and make lists that help me concentrate when I get back to my home office. Plus, it's a great feeling when you get to physically cross something off that list!

List-making is one useful thing that you can do while waiting in lines, sitting at the gate, during those minutes after they close the airplane door and you can't use your electronics. Whether or not you write on paper and then transfer the items to your laptop, list-making can be a stress-relieving exercise. It feels good to be organized, and most of all you will then know WHAT to work on when you get to the hotel and you have more time to concentrate on larger tasks.

Taking a Portable Classroom With You

For the most part, I have been oblivious to the revolution in portable audio that's taken over popular culture in the last 3 or 4 years. My husband has had an MP3 player for several years, and despite being a lifelong Macintosh user, he elected to buy products from Creative Labs.

I didn't pay any attention whatsoever to MP3s as an audio file type until I started seriously studying Internet Marketing about 15 months ago. My mentor delivered his telephone-based training on MP3s I could download from his website, and it wasn't until then that I even tried loading them onto some kind of portable device. My first attempt at taking audio with me was to load files onto my Pocket PC. Since I didn't have a lot of files, I could get the files loaded and listen at my convenience, though it was a very slow process.

As the months passed, I joined more newsletters, listened to and downloaded more training, and tried to keep up with the intake. In 15 short months, I accumulated over 48 hours of MP3 audio, and I realized I'd never get through all of it unless I bought an MP3 player. Since I am a confirmed Windows aficionado, I was a bit nervous as I went into the Apple store to buy a 60GB iPod (I knew I was going to need all the capacity I could afford).

I was hooked. I spent the next two days organizing and labeling all the audio files, because unlike downloading music from the Internet, very few of the files I had contained all the metadata that iTunes was expecting. I also downloaded a program called MediaMonkey to help get everything filled in: album, artist, year, genre, etc. I finally had my files in a device that was designed to deliver audio in a usable format.

Pod What?

There's a new phenomenon that is sweeping the audio-listening public: "podcasting." Think of "iPod" crossed with "broadcasting," and you now understand where the term came from. Podcasting is what my mentor had been doing: creating and delivering audio content in MP3 format; we just didn't have a name for it. Now the latest version of the iPod control software, iTunes, has automatic podcast retrieval built in. If an audio publisher has it set up properly, iTunes (and a half dozen other programs) can go out to the sites you specify and download the audio files for you at regular intervals.

Most of the podcasts out there are short in duration, anywhere from 8 to 30 minutes. Some are as long as 60 minutes. In the 3 weeks I've owned the device, I've sample the wares of 8 different podcast feeds, and the quality is wide ranging. Some are very chatty, but some do deliver real content.

As with many such phenomena, there are literally thousands of people getting in on the act. As a matter of fact, I'm evaluating the usefulness of podcasting myself for my business. Many of the large media outlets are embracing podcasting, realizing that they could be tapping into a whole new audience. What I want to do for you, my subscribers, is (as usual) get out there on the front lines and steer you towards the good sources of business information in audio format.

I think that podcasting could be the next wave of business instruction. I find it particularly appealing for the business traveler because the portability of the devices. I envision them walking around with MP3 players listening to business content in addition to any music they may procure.

I will do what I can to compile links to good business content. In turn, if you are already listening to podcasts and can point me towards content-rich, business audio publishers I'm all ears!

Travel Guide Plans

I've been going back through my scrawled notes from the last year's worth of travel to begin organizing them into my first 10 travel guides. Despite all my high-tech options for recording information, I found myself using the original word processor (a pencil) to keep track of the travel timings that will distinguish my guides from all the others.

I chose to work on 10 books at once because I wanted to develop a common format that would work across all the guides and make them consistent. The draft of the generic book outline is done; I leave on Wednesday to test the guide outline against reality in the city of Orlando, Florida.

My American readers are probably laughing at me, thinking that this is a veiled excuse to travel to one of the nation's top recreational destinations. Actually, Orlando has one of the biggest convention centers in the world, not just the US, and tens of thousands of convention attendees pass through that city on a yearly basis. My only mistake in this was selecting the month of August for that visit, when heat, humidity, and mosquitoes reign over all who dare to cross the city limits. Yes, I know I'm a wimp when it comes to humidity.

Here is the link to my site: <http://www.tooliethetravelguide.com>. I love to hear from my subscribers anytime!

Very "Toolie" yours,

Jocelyn Garner

Toolie The Travel Guide™

<http://www.ToolieTheTravelGuide.com>

Phone: +1-425-830-0740

Toll-free in the US: +1-877-4TOOLIE

Fax: +1-425-642-3034