

**Your business.
Your solution.**

Merit Travel books Purolator for on time and secure arrivals



- Innovative and easy-to-use automated and online tools, coupled with sophisticated electronic tracking make sending and tracking packages easy for staff.
- Set guidelines for No Signature Required packages make it easy for customer service personnel to know when packages can and can't be left without a signature, while ensuring packages arrive on time for departure.
- Merit Travel says lost shipments are down since they switched to Purolator. This means travelers get their vacation packages in time for departure.

Company name:

Merit Travel Group Inc.

Location:

Toronto, ON

Industry sector:

Travel

Company profile:

Merit Travel Group Inc. specializes in business and niche vacation travel. The company also provides loyalty travel and merchandise program redemption, as well as escorted tours to more than 200,000 travelers in Canada.

Business situation:

Facing significant growth and the need to ensure its travelers' vacation documents aren't lost or delayed, Merit Travel required a reliable courier service. The company also needed to be certain its packages arrived quickly and dependably whether heading to an urban or rural location.

Solution:

With Purolator, Merit Travel has the right combination of reliability and tracking capabilities to monitor the progress of important shipments to customers including travel tickets, tour vouchers and loyalty/gift cards. And, with guaranteed delivery services available across Canada, important and time sensitive inter-office shipments arrive when they are needed.

Benefits:

- Peace of mind for staff knowing travel documents are being professionally handled.
- Proactive troubleshooting and working together to anticipate and resolve challenges.
- Guaranteed* deliveries to more locations across Canada by 9AM or 10:30AM keeps staff focused on their customers without worrying about packages.

Summary

Merit Travel Group Inc. specializes in niche travel services for business and vacation travelers across Canada. With growing demands from clients seeking vacation experiences such as skiing, golf, scuba or cruise travel, Merit Travel has been rapidly expanding operations across Canada. Purolator has checked in to assist Merit Travel in delivering its loyalty/gift cards, travel packages and tickets to arrive on time for their travel clients.

Company profile

After more than 17 years in business, Merit Travel has expanded its services from providing corporate travel services to business travelers, into a multi-niche travel specialist, providing unique vacation experiences and all-inclusive tours for businesses and individuals. Since 1991, Merit Travel has grown to become the largest privately held specialty travel company in Canada. Last year, Merit Travel served more than 200,000 travelers across Canada.

From a business with one Mississauga office to a national travel agency operating from more than a dozen locations, Connie Merrithew, Facilities Manager, Merit Travel Group has helped manage the company growth for the past 10 years by overseeing the needs of each facility and merging new companies into their operations.

merit

Purolator
Where business is going

Your business. Your solution.

"We started as a corporate travel management company and started expanding," says Merrithew. "We wanted to be the specialist in certain niche areas such as vacations for skiers whether they are beginners or experts."

The business quickly expanded from operating in Mississauga, to opening a large Toronto location to support its corporate client base. After 9-11 when fewer people were traveling, Merrithew noted that many agencies were struggling to keep their doors open. During this time Merit Travel acquired new locations and helped keep those firms operational.

Since Purolator has the largest network in Canada, they use their own drivers, vehicles, planes and sorting depots for picking up and delivering packages and this provides a sense of security for Merit Travel's shipments.

Today, the company operates six business divisions, including MeritBiz, Merit Vacations Group, Exclusive Tours, Merit Loyalty Group, Merit Golf Vacations and Try That!. MeritBiz offers customized travel management solutions for corporations. Merit Vacations Group provides customized ski, scuba diving and small ship cruise packages for individuals and groups and also operates 12 retail locations in select cities across Canada. Merit Loyalty Group operates affinity travel programs. Merit Golf Vacations creates and markets unique golf programs and packages to golf clubs, groups and individuals. Try That!, a division created to offer unforgettable experiences such as gifts, celebrations, incentives, or meetings for Merit customers. Merit Travel now has a staff of almost 300 professionals, operating from 15 offices.

Challenges & Solutions

With growth, the need to ensure all documents and travel packages were visible and moving from corporate offices and staff home offices to their clients became essential.

Additionally, the firm needed the security of knowing where their packages were, and that customers were receiving them in a timely manner. While corporate business travelers often use e-tickets for confirmation, tours and vacation travelers require extensive packages that can even include a travel bag delivered to customers in advance of the trip. If packages arrive late, vacationers might not have their essential documents in time for their departure.

As the business further expanded to provide loyalty reward cards and merchandise redemptions, the need for a reliable courier service became even more critical. When coupled with the challenges of ensuring shipments containing airline tickets or tour vouchers arrive without delay, Merit Travel needed a courier service that was responsive and reliable.

"We were having some challenges with our previous partner," admits Merrithew, citing tickets and travel documents going missing, challenges sending packages internationally, a lack of responsiveness to address issues, and items not being delivered to customers are just some of the challenges they wanted to address. These challenges did not reflect well on Merit Travel and needed to be solved.

"Having worked with Purolator, as a courier provider, in my past position and having the experience with them, it was easy to find the right shipping and delivery solutions that fit our needs," she says.

Worry-free travel delivered

Merit Travel's peak season runs from September to the end of April, when many customers are traveling on tours and enjoying travel experiences. With agents working hard to get vacation requests processed, they don't have the time to triple check that a package has been delivered.

"Staff is so busy and once a trip leaves their desk, they don't want to have to worry about it," says Merrithew.

While they were challenged in the past with numerous missing vacation packages, with Purolator's stringent criteria for signature versus no signature required deliveries, coupled with Real Time Track & Trace, means staff is no longer

Your business. Your solution.

caught off guard when a client calls. Customer service personnel know what questions to ask to see if a client will qualify for a no signature required delivery (such as living in an apartment with no concierge to sign for the delivery). In the event packages can't be left, the staff knows immediately that they will need to find an alternative delivery option such as receiving the package at the office.

Merrithew says Purolator helps Merit Travel avoid uncomfortable situations that it dealt with in the past. "Getting a call from a client the day before departure saying their tickets haven't arrived yet creates chaos as we scramble to get everything re-issued and delivered before their plane leaves," she explains.

Merrithew appreciates being able to send packages to field staff overnight for delivery by either 9AM or 10:30AM guaranteed* because staff can be up and running at the start of a business day.

Merit Travel ships more than 60 packages a day from offices across Canada, and also relies on Purolator to get vacation information to groups traveling from the US. Merrithew notes that while the majority of their packages are sent within Canada, the firm depends on Purolator to ease deliveries to the US as well.

Exclusive tours call for special shipments

Merrithew notes that when it comes to delivering packages for their Exclusive Tours programs such as a river cruises down the Danube, the maps, city information and tour details are packed with tickets in a travel bag. These shipments are particularly important to Merit Travel because getting replacement materials pulled together is time consuming for staff. And, if the client is leaving the next day, getting the materials delivered before the flight leaves can be stressful for Merit Travel and the vacationer.

"Our leisure travelers are sent information and documentation along with their tickets and as a result are our largest user of Purolator services. We know that once our bag is picked up by Purolator, our client's vacation is in good hands," she says.

Security critical for loyalty cards

In addition to travel tickets and tour vouchers, Merit Loyalty group sends customers gift cards and loyalty program cards that have a dollar value. Due to the value of these items, making sure those packages make it safely to customers is critical. "The cards have a dollar value so we need excellent tracking and proof of delivery," says Merrithew. "With Purolator's online tracking capabilities, we know where every package is and can monitor it until someone has signed for it. I don't think we have ever had a problem getting something to a client with Purolator."

In addition, since Purolator has the largest network in Canada, they use their own drivers, vehicles, planes and sorting depots for picking up and delivering packages and this provides a sense of security for Merit Travel's shipments.

"We have lots of clients in remote locations and since Purolator has the largest shipping network in Canada, we know that Purolator delivers directly to the most points. Even when using partners for a small number of remote locations, we can still track our important shipments every step of the way."

Purolator's network and reach means there are minimal hand offs to deliver packages to remote locations. And, with Real Time Tracking and Proof of Delivery, Merit Travel has peace of mind knowing their travel tickets, vouchers, bags and gift cards and loyalty program cards can be tracked, from pick-up to delivery – this element of security is important to Merit Travel.

Critical data arrives on time

Travel agencies are required by law to submit regular reports to the International Association of Travel Agents outlining all tickets that have been issued. These reports are output by a specialized program called BSP by Merit Travel's head office staff, who compile the data from all locations across the country.

To compile the reports, the head office needs the data with the detailed ticket issuing information from each of the offices and every division. The timing for this reporting is mission critical for Merit Travel.

We depend on Purolator to make sure these internal packages arrive on time to be able to create and submit important reports.

Your business. Your solution.

Reporting made easy

Purolator's online shipping application accepts cost centre referencing which can be grouped and subtotaled on an invoice or financial report. This saves Merit Travel staff time and speeds turnaround time for internal billing.

Merrithew also notes that with Purolator's online shipping application she can pull a variety of reports highlighting different areas of the business, while getting an accurate picture of their courier spend. This is very important to Merit Travel because each division operates independently so all expenses and revenues need to be accounted for within the right division.

Challenges solved proactively together

With any new service, strong communication is the key to an effective relationship. Merrithew is impressed with the level of professionalism Merit Travel receives from Purolator staff. With on-site training and dedicated customer support, Merrithew is assured that her staff are choosing the services best suited to their clientele.

"Purolator is constantly evolving to address a client's challenge before the issues arise," she says, noting the installation of a drop box at the loading dock resolved a challenge of reception closing before the driver had a chance to pick up late packages.

Whether during business hours, or emergencies that arise after closing, Merrithew says Purolator staff, including their Purolator Account Executive, Marc Angeli goes above and beyond to help quickly resolve problems or issues they might have.

The future

With continued growth on the horizon, Merrithew is confident that Merit Travel's relationship with Purolator will also continue to grow. The company is investigating new opportunities to expand the business into new specialized services, such as a concierge service, and travel redemption for credit card companies through its Merit Loyalty Group division.

"Purolator is constantly changing and growing to meet our needs, and we appreciate innovations such as low emission vehicles, online shipping and new technology to make things easier and easier for us. I can only see it getting better and better for us."

Purolator is constantly changing and growing to meet our needs, and we appreciate innovations such as low emission vehicles, online shipping and new technology to make things easier and easier for us.

Early morning deliveries keep field staff productive

In addition to having staff working in their branch offices, Merit Travel has staff working from home offices and these field employees need the same fast and easy access to deliveries as they have in the office.

Merrithew appreciates being able to send packages to field staff overnight for delivery by either 9AM or 10:30AM guaranteed* because staff can be up and running at the start of a business day. For example, if they need a new computer delivered, the staff member can be on the phone with tech support by nine a.m. and working shortly afterwards. If that computer didn't arrive until noon, Merit Travel would have lost an entire day of productivity.

Purolator understands the need for flexibility when it comes to accessing user-friendly shipping solutions. Merit Travel employees are able to login to their shipping account from the office, at home or on the road.

For more information about how Purolator can partner with your organization to exceed your customer's expectations, call a Purolator Representative today at **1-888-529-9777**

* Certain terms, conditions and geographical restrictions apply. See Purolator's Terms and Conditions, available at www.purolator.com for details.

Copyright ©2008 Purolator Courier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Merit Travel and Exclusive Tours are registered trademarks of Merit Travel Group Inc. and Merit Loyalty Group Inc.

