

## Use of work air miles up for debate

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**A German court recently ruled that an employer owns air miles earned on the job.**

**(CNN) -- Clocking up air miles while you are traveling for work might seem like an attractive prospect -- until your employer tells you they are not yours to use.**

A German executive who had earned air miles on work-related Lufthansa flights that would buy more than \$11,000 worth of air travel took the matter to court when the employer believed it owned the points.

The judge recently ruled in favor of the company, stating that air miles collected on business trips belonged to the company that paid for the trip.

It also said that any miles earned on business could be used for private travel only with the employer's permission -- essentially, any points earned by business travelers belong to whoever paid for the ticket.

So what can globe-trotting executives do to retain what is often seen as the upside of spending their lives in the air?

Ravindra Bhagwanani is general manager of Frankfurt-based Global Flight, which specializes in helping airlines manage frequent flyer programs and assists travelers who want to make use of them.

He told CNN that the implications of the court case -- the first of its kind in Europe -- could have wide-reaching implications as other companies look to make savings by using employees' air miles earned on work trips to subsidize future business trips.

"It was the first time that a court decision was taken in favor of the company using the miles, and more and more companies are looking into this. How they can really use the miles of their employers to reduce their own travel costs," he said.

Bhagwanani estimates companies could save as much as 10 percent of their travel costs by commandeering their employees' air miles.

"If you use the frequent flyer miles on a corporate level -- and this can be quite a sum for a lot of companies -- and that's the motivation for companies to look into this and so it's not based on a court decision it's really on the fact that there's money in there and that they can use their money for better things than air travel costs."

With U.S. companies alone spend more than \$200 billion dollars a year on travel, it is no wonder the accountants find the idea tempting.