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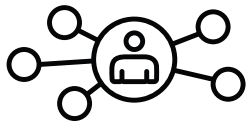
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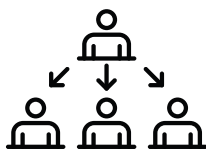
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—Mary O'Hara, Director Corporate Services, DTCC

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BUSINESS TRAVEL NEWS



DISTRIBUTION

Travelport CEO Greg Webb discuss his company's \$500 million in new financing and its plans to navigate the Covid-19 crisis.

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MEETINGS

In-person meetings remain a long-term proposition, but hotels are designing cleaning and distancing protocols for when they return.

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Bizly's Kevin Iwamoto on demonstrating your valuable strategic contributions to your company, even in a time when travel is on hold.

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TOP STORY



GBTA Interim CEO
Dave Hilfman

BY ELIZABETH WEST

GBTA Names Dave Hilfman Interim CEO

SOLOMBRINO DEPARTS BUT RESULTS OF MISCONDUCT INVESTIGATION ARE NOT YET CLEAR

Facing a revolt from staffers, members and sponsors perhaps unlike any it has seen in its more than 50 years of existence, the Global Business Travel Association has replaced CEO Scott Solombrino. In his stead, the organization has appointed industry veteran Dave Hilfman as interim CEO. Sources close to the deal told BTN the term of Hilfman's agreement is "about six months."

The terms of Solombrino's departure, however, were unclear at press time. The embattled CEO had been on administrative leave since June 19, pending the outcome of an investigation into a string of workplace misconduct allega-

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Survey: EU Travel Managers Lifting Bans, Not N. America

BY DAWIT HABTEMARIAM

Nearly twice as many European travel managers than their North American counterparts have allowed business travel to resume, according to a Uniglobe Travel survey conducted last month. About 61 percent of European respondents said their firms either are traveling already or expect to in the next three months, compared with 32 percent of North American respondents.

The travel agency between June 15 and June 25 surveyed 263 travel managers or those with decision-making authority or impact on their organization's travel program. Nearly 96 percent of the respondents were Uniglobe Travel clients, with the rest prospective clients. About 84 percent of the respondents said they are responsible for 100 or fewer travelers, with 10 percent responsible for 100 to 500 travelers.

About 42 percent of the survey respondents were based in Europe, 31

percent in North America, 15 percent in the Indian subcontinent, 8 percent in Asia, 3 percent in Africa with the remainder in the Middle East, Australia, New Zealand, South and Central America and the Caribbean.

More travel manager respondents in Europe, at 56 percent, already had updated their travel policies than their counterparts in North America, at 41 percent. Among all respondents, 48 percent have updated their travel policies to reflect the Covid-19 travel environment, while 21 percent said they have not, but are considering or planning to do so, according to the survey.

North American companies were less sure-footed about their travel future, with 51 percent of this cohort saying they don't know or it's too early to say when their employees will start traveling. That compared

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"We've built guidance on layers of measures, because there's not a silver bullet. There's not a vaccine yet or one medical measure that will cover it all."

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Concur Plots Road Ahead with Booking Tool Rebuild

BY ADAM PERROTTA

SAP Concur continues to hold a dominant position in the corporate booking and expense management vertical, but the company is facing increased challenges from other players seeking to carve out market share by emphasizing user experience, customization and access to a full range of content, including New Distribution Capability elements.

While no other single provider likely will challenge Concur's spot as the 800-pound gorilla in the market anytime soon, the collective competition—from startups and longtime providers with recently scaled-up ambitions—could represent a potential threat to at least some of Concur's market share. But the company isn't standing pat in the face of the new challenges—and isn't simply relying on its market ubiquity to fend off competition. Instead, it has launched a major booking platform overhaul, with user-friendliness, flexible architecture and a fuller array of content sources as driving principles.

Dubbed T2 internally, the project has been in the works for “the last couple of years,” and is envisioned as a “complete re-write” of Concur's online booking tool, according to Chip Crow, senior director for travel product strategy for the company.

While maintaining such core existing features as expense management integration, policy controls and visibility into off-channel booking via Concur Trip-Link, T2 adds several new capabilities.

Key among the updates are a revamped user interface offering consistency across desktop and mobile and “seamless integration of content from both GDS and non-GDS sources,” Crow said. Meanwhile, “richer and more complex data sources” enable more dynamic policy benchmarking, while advances in spend and approval workflow capabilities help move “toward our vision of eliminating expense reports altogether,” he added. It's all built from the ground-up

“We refocused our efforts on rebuilding our technology from scratch ... and those major efforts are now ready for us to build client-facing solutions on top of them.”

—CONCUR'S CHIP CRAW

on new systems infrastructure, with a modular architecture that enables easy enhancements and add-ons, he noted.

The decision to overhaul Concur's booking tool was driven by the emergence of “new markets with new customer challenges,” according to Crow. “These markets require new solutions with fundamentally different core technology, [and] they're less dependent on GDS technology” than are the U.S. and Europe.

Crow went on to cite the “hard lessons” Concur learned from prior efforts to develop by evolving upon existing technology and systems rather than making more fundamental changes. “So we refocused our efforts on rebuilding our technology from scratch ... and those major efforts are now ready for us to build client-facing solutions on top of them.”

The first T2-powered solutions will be rolled out this year, with rail and hotel bookings the first to be addressed, and air to follow, Crow said. First out of the gate will be a new rail booking platform for Spain—a market where Concur is making its local debut—with full market availability projected by the fourth quarter of 2020. Rail booking for the Benelux region will follow.

For hotels, a new Concur booking platform will offer a more consumer-like booking experience, with features including finer details on rates and amenities, as well as GDS and direct connect sourcing in one channel for easy rate comparison.

As Concur prepares to roll out its revamped booking platform, other players that could be making moves in the sector include Deem, which is doubling down on booking after sunseting its expense platform and coming under the corporate umbrella of Enterprise Holdings last year. Deem recently launched a marketing initiative with two dozen travel management companies under which the company will front marketing funding to TMCs, which will in turn promote adoption of Deem's booking products to their corporate clients.

Meanwhile, tech-forward—and deep-pocketed—travel management specialist TripActions continues to build out its booking and expense capabilities, while the recently re-branded Emburse conglomerate continues to more closely integrate payment and expense management across its various brands. ■

Southwest Limits Onboard Capacity Through Sept. 30, AA Fully Booking

BY MICHAEL B. BAKER

Southwest Airlines will continue its policy of keeping middle seats open through at least Sept. 30, the carrier announced last month.

Southwest, which allows travelers to pick their own seats when boarding, is not blocking middle seats but is selling flights at reduced capacity so that no one has to take a middle seat. Those traveling together who wish to use middle seats still are allowed to use them.

American Airlines, however, on July 1 began booking flights to capacity, it announced.

American during the past several months had limited capacity on flights to about 85 percent, a less strict capacity cap than some of its competitors, including Delta Air Lines, which is blocking all middle seats and limiting economy seating to 60 percent capacity. American now allows flights to be completely sold, though travelers

are notified of full flights and allowed to move to less crowded flights without charge when available. That puts it in line with the policy enacted by United Airlines in May.

American also is creating a new Travel Health Advisory Panel that includes health experts from Vanderbilt University Medical Center for guidance in such areas as disease prevention and cleaning procedures.

As of June 30, American began asking travelers to verify that they have been free of a list of Covid-19 symptoms for the past 14 days, a checklist it developed with Vanderbilt.

Southwest travelers also must confirm that they do not have symptoms and have not been diagnosed with or exposed to the virus within 14 days prior to the travel date.

American also is working with the Global Biorisk Advisory Council to achieve accreditation for its fleet and lounge cleaning procedures, which it expects to gain by year-end. ■



IATA Maps Path to Safe Airline Industry Recovery

During the past several months, the International Air Transport Association has been cooperating with travel industry and medical groups to develop a “restart” program that advises of the most effective measures of preventing Covid-19 spread as airlines restore and rebuild service. IATA director of passenger and facilitation Pierre Charbonneau last month spoke with BTN transportation editor Michael B. Baker about the roadmap and the need for cooperation with governments and regulators around the world to avoid a restart as “totally disorganized” as the shutdown.

WHAT DOES THE ROADMAP FOR RESTARTING AVIATION ENTAIL?

Our focus at IATA has been on a number of topics, but I mostly have been involved in working with the medical advisors, the World Health Organization, our medical advisory group, [the International Civil Aviation Organization] and other partners to put back a passenger process that will restore confidence in passengers flying and give governments some reassurance to relax the border restrictions. Everything was done with the view in mind to mitigate the further transmission of the Covid-19 virus.

We produced guidance and looked at every touchpoint of the passenger journey. We drafted a series of measures that really look at, first, having the customers be fit to fly before they leave home. If they’re symptomatic, they should not be traveling, so there’s a lot of communication being done around that. Then, if you are able to do your check-in at home instead of at the airport, and in some countries, airlines will let you print your bag [tag] at home. Then, once you get to the airport, what measures can we do to make sure you mitigate the risk of transmission? It’s not unlike what you see in your daily life now, with social distancing and increased sanitization of all the airport equipment, contactless technology and wearing your mask.

We’ve built that guidance on those layers of measures, because there’s not a silver bullet. There’s not a vaccine yet or one medical measure that will cover it all. We’ve included temperature screening in the process and a new way of boarding, and a way of reducing carry-on baggage for faster deplaning. [We’re] working with countries to make sure the arrival process is slick and [maximizes] the electronic forms for border control, for instance.

At the time that we drafted the guidance, we’re still keeping a very close eye on the evolution of the testing process, and we have made a position the testing is another element that can be added to the travel journey once it meets the proper criteria to be effective. That means for it to be fast, scalable, efficient and cost-free for customers, and convenient and done prior to departure.

WHAT’S THE PLAN TO IMPLEMENT THE GUIDANCE?

The guidance was very incremental, as we work with ICAO and a group called [Council Aviation Recovery Task Force], who took this guidance and re-organized it



IATA’s Pierre Charbonneau talks:

- “Layered” measures necessary for safe air travel
- Why IATA discourages the quarantine approach
- When measures should be removed

“If one day travel picks up and load factors are 85 or 90 percent, and [carriers] don’t want to leave the space onboard, what’s the argument then?”

so it’s shared with all the countries around the world that are members of ICAO. Now, we’re working with those regions to look at the documentation and ask the governments to consider it and see if they’re comfortable with that. We’re in the implementation, deployment and monitoring stage of putting this guidance around the globe.

The real challenge now is that some states will be going faster than others, only because the virus is now disappearing a bit more in some places and in others is very active. If you look at countries like Australia and New Zealand, they have things that work between them but are still closed to the rest of the world. One of the challenges we have now is to try to get an understanding and try to influence so that there’s a centered assessment being made, so it’s predictable to the triggers [that] allow a reopening and is not totally disorganized as it was in the shutdown.

IATA HAS DISCOURAGED COUNTRIES FROM QUARANTINING VISITORS. WHAT IS THE REASONING FOR THAT?

Quarantine for us is pretty much the equivalent of not reopening your borders. If the world needs to get the economy back on track, a quarantine discourages anyone from traveling. You can’t plan your trip with a quarantine to get around. We should really focus on, first of all, making sure that the layers of measures we have are well-executed, so customers have their own responsibility to comply with them.

WHAT IS THE PLAN LATER IN THE ROADMAP WHEN THE SITUATION BEGINS TO IMPROVE?

We don’t want the layered measures to stay forever as part of the travel experience. Anyone who is traveling now will tell you it’s the weirdest experience they’ve probably ever had in an airport. What we’re looking at now is, as the borders reopen, we want to focus on when will be the right time to remove some of those measures that are no longer necessary. The ones that will probably make a better industry should be accelerated: the contactless technology, the use of biometrics, the passenger data improvements. [Those] make a better industry and don’t cause any issues from a customer standpoint.

WHAT ABOUT AIRLINES THAT TAKE MORE STRICT MEASURES IN ORDER TO REGAIN PASSENGER CONFIDENCE?

These are guidelines, the minimum of what should get done, based on medical science. Some airlines have gone beyond that and have started their own campaign promoting over and above sanitization or leaving an empty seat, because at this time in people’s psyche, seeing the full cabin makes them nervous. If the airlines do it, it’s their decision, but it shouldn’t contradict the message. Let’s make sure that down the road it doesn’t become something you’re stuck with. If one day travel picks up and load factors are 85 or 90 percent, and you don’t want to leave the space onboard, what’s the argument then? Just be careful with the communication of the extra measures, that it’s for restoring confidence.

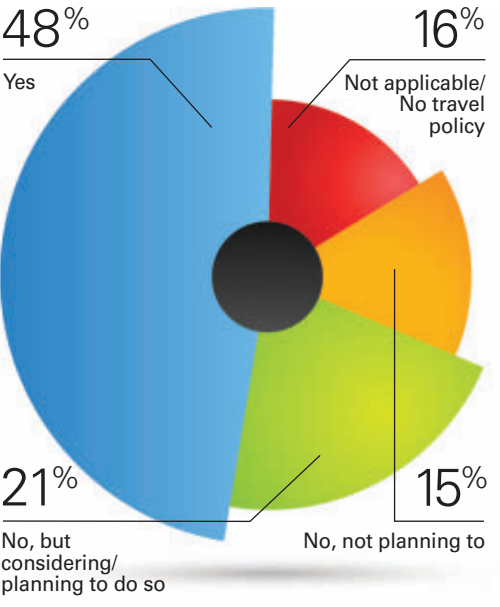
IS PART OF THIS SIMPLY EDUCATING THE PUBLIC ON THE PROBABILITY OF ON-BOARD TRANSMISSION?

Once you understand the mechanism of the airflow onboard the cabin, the use of filters, the fact that people face the same direction and other measures that are now added, it’s an interesting story to tell. The real challenge is will customers accept it and believe it? It’s up to us as an industry. ■

Searching for a Way Forward Amid Covid-19

As Covid-19 cases spike throughout the southern and western United States and the European Union bans U.S. travelers without quarantine, a return to business travel normalcy seems distant and hazy. Still, many organizations are considering how best to handle business travel via policy, including whether travelers can opt out, or whether they should travel at all. But U.S. travel agency and airline data show there's not yet much demand to get back on the road.

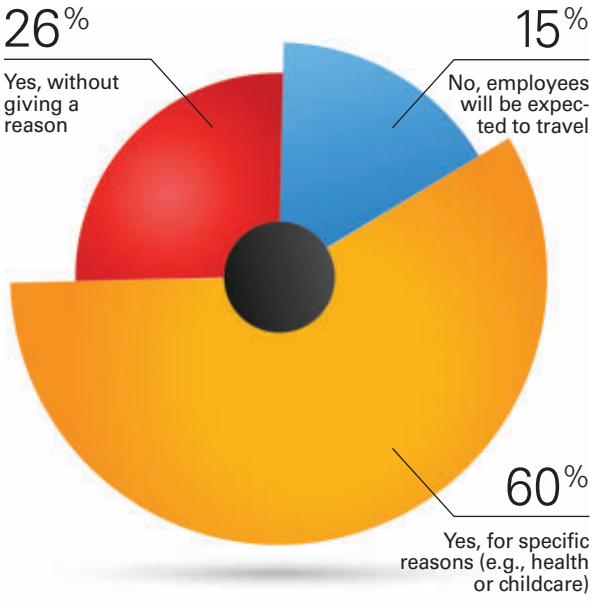
HAS YOUR ORGANIZATION UPDATED TRAVEL POLICY TO REFLECT COVID-19?



Source: Uniglobe Travel June 15-25 worldwide survey of 263 travel managers

MOST TO ALLOW TRAVEL OPT-OUT

Once business travel is permitted, will your employees be allowed to decide whether to travel?



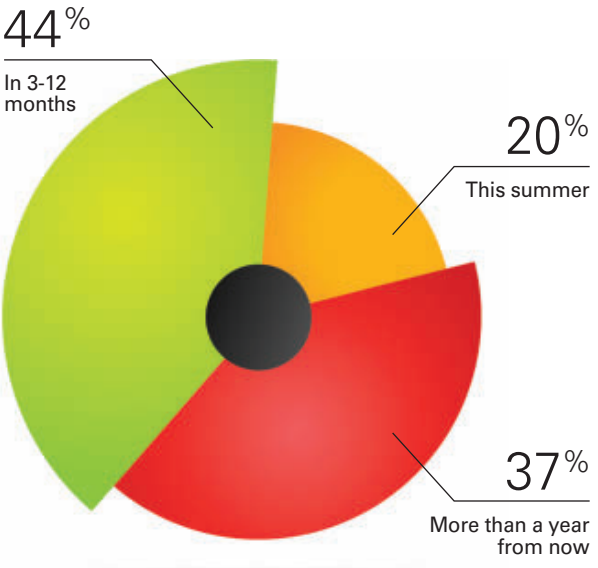
Source: Mercer June 2020 survey of 821 companies

14%
OF SURVEYED CTM CLIENTS BELIEVE THE POLICY CHANGES THEIR COMPANIES HAVE ENACTED DUE TO COVID-19 ARE PERMANENT.

Source: Corporate Travel Management April-May 2020 worldwide survey of more than 300 clients

EPIDEMIOLOGISTS IN NO RUSH TO FLY

When do you expect to fly on an airplane?



Source: New York Times May 24-31 survey of 512 epidemiologists

ARC: AIR TICKETS SOLD BY U.S. AGENCIES

7-Day Period Ending	Agency type, YOY change		
	Corporate	Online	Leisure/Other
June 14	-90.3%	-63.4%	-78.3%
June 21	-89.8%	-67.0%	-78.8%
June 28	-88.9%	-69.1%	-78.6%
July 5	-88.2%	-74.1%	-79.8%
Year to Date	-57.87%	-50.40%	-53.83%

Source: ARC

CARRIERS' U.S. JULY CAPACITY

	YOY Change, July 2020
Southwest Airlines	-34%
American Airlines	-50%
Delta Air Lines	-63%
United Airlines	-69%
Total	-54%

Source: Cirium



United to Restore 25,000 Flights in August

United Airlines is restoring about half of its domestic schedule in August as well as some international routes, particularly in Latin America, the carrier announced.

In all, the carrier will triple the number of flights compared with June, adding about 25,000 domestic and international flights in August. That will bring United to about 40 percent of what its schedule was last August. The carrier will operate 48 percent of its domestic schedule, compared with 30 percent in July, and 25 percent of its international schedule, compared with 16 percent in July.

The domestic growth will concentrate largely on United's hubs in Chicago, Houston and Denver, as demand growth currently is slower in its coastal hubs, VP of domestic network planning Ankit Gupta said in a July 1 media call. The growth also will double United's flights from Newark, return about 90 aircraft into service and restore some service to Hawaii.

United is basing that growth on an "uptick in demand," Gupta said. The carrier cited U.S. Transportation Security Administration statistics showing that more than 600,000 passengers went through security checkpoints on June 29, which was the first time volume has reached a quarter of that seen on the commensurate weekday in 2019.

While the schedule caters to leisure travelers seeking "socially distant vacation options," such as mountains and national parks, United expects to see some business travel returning as well.

"We've seen companies begin to relax travel policies in the last few weeks," chief communications officer Josh Earnest said July 1. "Hopefully, that's a leading indicator that demand from business travel will begin to increase."

Gupta noted that business demand growth is coming largely from small and midsize businesses, while

"We've seen companies begin to relax travel policies in the last few weeks. Hopefully, that's a leading indicator that demand from business travel will begin to increase."

—UNITED'S JOSH EARNEST

the larger corporate sector still is lagging. United's sales team has been soliciting feedback from its corporate customers in terms of the routes they will need the most as service is restored.

New international routes in August will include 35 routes to the Latin America and Caribbean region, including service between Houston and Lima, between Newark and São Paulo and between Mexico City and each Chicago, Newark and San Francisco. The carrier also is restoring service to San Salvador and Guatemala City and is adding service to Cancun, Guadalajara and Leon in Mexico as well as Panama City and three destinations in the Dominican Republic: Santiago, Santo Domingo and Punta Cana.

New transatlantic routes include restoring service between San Francisco and London, between Chicago and both Brussels and Frankfurt and between Newark and each Brussels, Munich and Zurich.

United in September will inaugurate three times weekly service between Chicago O'Hare and Tel Aviv, and in the same month also will boost service between Tel Aviv and Newark Liberty International Airport to 10 weekly flights from daily. The carrier on July 8 resumed three times weekly San Francisco-Tel Aviv service, and in October will reinstate three times weekly Washington Dulles-Tel Aviv service.

While the European Union has extended its ban on U.S. visitors as Covid-19 intensifies its spread in several U.S. states, United VP of international network and alliances Patrick Quayle said the restored service in Europe already was based on current restrictions.

United in August also plans to resume service between Delhi and both San Francisco and Newark, should travel restrictions to India be lifted.

On transpacific routes, United plans to restart service three times per week to Tahiti in August. The carrier will be restarting some other transpacific service in July, including service between Chicago and Tokyo's Haneda Airport, between San Francisco and Hong Kong with continuing service to Singapore, service to Seoul and between San Francisco and Shanghai. In September, United will resume weekly Chicago O'Hare-Hong Kong service, as well as service three times weekly between Los Angeles and Sydney. ■

American Airlines Plans 'Significantly Smaller' International Network for 2021

American Airlines is adjusting its network plans over the next year to account for a "prolonged downturn in international travel," with summer 2021 long-haul capacity scheduled to be 25 percent lower than it was in 2019.

The plans include ending several routes, particularly shifting away some long-haul international service from Los Angeles International Airport to "concentrate on the hub's domestic strength," according to American. It no longer will fly from Los Angeles to Hong Kong, Buenos Aires, São Paulo, Beijing and

Shanghai. Ending the Shanghai service is contingent on approval to move the Shanghai service to Seattle, where American also still intends to launch service to Bangalore and London next year in conjunction with its new partnership with Alaska Airlines.

Other routes that American will terminate include service from Charlotte to each Barcelona, Rome and Paris; Dallas-Fort Worth to Munich; Miami to both Brasilia and Milan; and Philadelphia to each Berlin, Budapest and Dubrovnik, Croatia. Additionally, American is canceling plans to launch service be-

tween Chicago and each Budapest, Prague and Krakow and between Philadelphia and Casablanca, Morocco.

With the service changes in Los Angeles, American will make Dallas-Fort Worth its major transpacific hub. Miami will remain the main hub for the Caribbean, Central and South America and Philadelphia the main hub for travel to Europe, once transatlantic restrictions are eased.

With its international network reduced, American plans to "further integrate into our partners' hubs" for connectivity, according to chief revenue officer Vasu Raja. It plans, for example, to resume its full schedule to London Heathrow by next year, where it will work with partner British Airways for further connectivity.

"Covid-19 has forced us to reevaluate our network," Raja said in a statement. "American will have a significantly smaller international network in the year ahead, but we are using this opportunity to hit reset and create a network using the strength of our strategic hubs that we can build on, be profitable on and grow on in this new environment." ■

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Some European Countries Making Special Arrangements for Business Travelers

BY AMON COHEN

If you're a travel manager hoping for special treatment from European governments to get business travel moving again, keep hoping. All European Union member states currently operate blanket bans on visitors from outside Europe, and many European nations continue to ban visitors from other European countries or allow them entry only if they undergo quarantine.

There usually are exemptions for workers in such occupations as diplomacy, medicine, agriculture and key infrastructure maintenance. However, only a half-dozen European nations are making exceptions to their normal rules for routine business travel purposes, such as sales trips or internal company meetings.

Moreover, only one country appears to have launched a concerted strategy to resume foreign business travel for its own citizens: Denmark, which has made pre-trip coronavirus testing available nationwide for businesspeople visiting countries that demand a negative test certificate as a condition of entry. Testing also is available upon travelers' return, so they can return to the office without undergoing quarantine.

Other measures introduced by the Danish government include a web page summarizing travel requirements for major export markets and offering guidance on travel precautions for businesses.

"Business travel was one of the first things the Danish government wanted to address to get the economy moving again," said Anne Mette Berg, general manager of the Danish Business Travel Association. "It's a result of close cooperation with Denmark's two largest employer organizations. They have worked together because many jobs depend upon exports."

According to guidelines for business travel published by the Danish government, "An estimated 800,000 Danish jobs are linked to exports. Without real access to international business travel from Denmark, Danish businesses will lose orders and market shares. This can have long-term impacts on the Danish economy. It is equally important that Danish businesses have access to partners and investors travelling to Denmark from abroad."

The Netherlands also is offering limited encouragement of outbound business travel. The government has said Dutch citizens should travel abroad for essential reasons only. All leisure travel is deemed non-essential, whereas that determination is at the individual discretion of business travelers.

One explanation for the absence of positive discrimination for business travel is European cultural attitudes. A "Restart Business Travel" task force created by German travel managers association VDR has called for consistent rules nationally and across the EU regarding hygiene and border entry requirements. It also wants pooling of information on travel regulations at the national and EU levels. However, VDR emphatically is not seeking special dispensation for corporate travel. "I see difficulty in making an environment where a business traveler is treated differently from someone going on holiday. Everyone should be treated the same," said executive director Hans-Ingo Biehl.

"The EU is about open borders for everyone, so there is not much differentiation between business and leisure visitors," explained Suzanne Sangiovese, commercial and communications director for travel risk consultancy Riskline. "Of course, the coronavirus doesn't discriminate between business or leisure travelers either. It's very different from North America, where the business travel industry has much more

clout than in the EU."

Another complication is whether companies actually wish to travel. Berg said many Danish companies understand their government wants them back in the air but remain reticent, worrying especially about employers enduring unanticipated quarantine in destination countries.

"Our members don't expect to travel much before the end of the year," she said. "Nearly all our members have complete [corporate] travel bans or at the very least require senior management approval." ■

Governments Making Special Arrangements For Their Own Business Travelers

DENMARK:

- Anyone taking a foreign business trip can request a test for coronavirus, with results available within 30 hours. On return from abroad, business travelers can take another test so they may return to their office without isolating for the standard recommended quarantine period of 14 days. There are test centers across Denmark. A digital solution for issuing certificates is under development.
- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark provides information about current restrictions on entry and stays abroad, focusing initially on selected major export markets.
- The government provides advice on the precautions businesses should take before, during and after travelling.

Governments Making Special Arrangements For Inbound Business Travelers

CROATIA: Nationals of the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Austria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia and Germany may enter on non-essential business. Nationals from other countries can visit for business reasons on production of an invitation from the business they are meeting and if they adhere to social distancing and other epidemiological precautions.

DENMARK: Business travel is considered a worthwhile purpose for entering Denmark without quarantine. Travelers must present one of:

- a meeting invitation from the company they are visiting, including scheduled time and place and an explanation of why it would be impractical to postpone the meeting or work and why it can't take place virtually.
- evidence of a contractual relationship with the company
- contact information for the person they are meeting, who must confirm the meeting is taking place and its necessity.

FINLAND: Entry now is permitted with no restrictions to visitors from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Iceland, Norway and Denmark. Business visitors from other countries may be permitted entry on production of a letter of invitation from the company they are visiting. After being allowed into the country, they are allowed only to travel to their hotel and the company they are meeting unless they quarantine in their hotel first for 14 days.

GREECE: Greece has reopened to visitors from the rest of the EU plus Norway, Iceland and Switzerland. Non-EU business travelers are allowed entry with an authorization issued by the Greek embassy or consulate in their home country.

HUNGARY: Citizens of Czech Republic, Austria, Germany, Slovakia, Serbia, Slovenia and Croatia are permitted entry without undergoing a mandatory quarantine. Visitors from Bulgaria, Poland, South Korea and Japan may enter for business trips.

SPAIN: Visitors arriving for documented work purposes are permitted from EU countries plus Iceland, Norway and Switzerland. From June 21, Spain will reopen without quarantine to all visitors from 27 European countries.

Research by Riskline and BTN. No travel arrangements should be made solely on the basis of this information.

U.K. Eases Covid-19 Quarantine Measures

BY ANDY HOSKINS

Passengers returning to England from destinations identified as low-risk no longer will have to self-isolate for 14 days, the Department for Transport and FCO have announced.

The measures came into effect July 10, with the government initially naming Germany, France, Spain and Italy among the nations it considers at low risk from coronavirus and from which arrivals need no longer self-isolate.

The full list of 59 destinations has been published but is subject to review. Long-haul countries on the list include Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam and a host of Caribbean destinations.

In Europe, it includes Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Hungary, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Switzerland and Turkey, among others.

In addition, the FCO changed its advice against 'all but essential' international travel,

with those changes implemented on July 4.

The exempt destinations were identified by the Joint Biosecurity Centre in consultation with Public Health England and the Chief Medical Officer, which assessed factors such as the prevalence of coronavirus, the numbers of new cases and potential trajectory of the diseases.

The development is a welcome change to the widely criticized quarantine measures that were introduced in early June and applied to almost all travelers. The Business Travel Association said the move "is a welcome relief for the business travel sector, which is still at risk of losing one in two jobs in coming months".

It added that it had not supported quashing quarantine completely: "Safety must remain paramount, and the traffic-light system is a more practical solution to the evolving global situation."

All passengers still will be required to provide

contact information on arrival in the UK and those transiting through non-exempt countries must self-isolate for 14 days.

"Whether you are a holidaymaker ready to travel abroad or a business eager to open your doors again, this is good news for British people and great news for British businesses," says Transport Secretary Grant Shapps.

Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales will define their own approaches to quarantine exemptions. Ireland is exempt as part of the common travel area, as are the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man and 14 British Overseas Territories.

Current U.K. 'Low-Risk' Areas

The full list of destinations from which passengers returning after July 10 need no longer self-isolate is: Andorra, Antigua and Barbuda, Aruba, Australia, Austria, Bahamas, Barbados, Belgium, Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba, Croatia, Curaçao, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Dominica, Faroe Islands, Fiji, Finland, France, French Polynesia, Germany, Greece, Greenland, Grenada, Guadeloupe, Hong Kong, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Macau, Malta, Mauritius, Monaco, the Netherlands, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Réunion, San Marino, Serbia, Seychelles, South Korea, St. Barthélemy, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Pierre and Miquelon, Switzerland, Taiwan, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey, Vatican City and Vietnam. ■

CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

EU Travel Mgrs. Relax Bans

with 27 percent of European respondents who were equally unsure.

The variation in return-to-travel plans between Europe and North America comes as local governments in both regions continue to manage virus spread and adjust travel restrictions accordingly.

With Covid-19 case counts steadily down in many European countries, European Commission asked for coordinated border openings across the Schengen region as of June 15. Though some countries still have specific restrictions, including 14-day quarantines, the free-travel zone is moving toward a larger reopening. As of July 1, the EU opened borders to 15 non-EU countries, though each EU member may choose which countries among the 15 to admit. The United Kingdom implemented a 14-day quarantine on all international arrivals on June 8, but it has now eliminated its self-quarantine requirement for countries deemed low-risk for coronavirus and was on track to admit travelers from 59 non-EU countries by July 10. The United States, however, has not made the cut on either the EU list or the U.K. list.

Indeed, with case counts rising in the U.S., some state borders have imposed restrictions on travelers. Earlier in the pandemic, Florida, Rhode Island and Texas initiated 14-day self-quarantine for anyone traveling from New York, New Jersey or Connecticut and other hotspots in Michigan and Louisiana. Some of those restrictions have expired. On June 24, however, as cases began to spike in the Southern and Western U.S., New York, Connecticut and New Jersey mandated a 14-day quarantine for travelers arriving from several states.

Policy Particulars

Among respondents who have changed or are planning to change their policy, 64 percent said they will limit or ban travel for internal company meetings. About 54 percent have limited participation at conference and meetings based on attendee numbers or place of origin, while 44 percent have added a trip-approval process.

The variation in return-to-travel plans between Europe and North America comes as local governments in both regions continue to manage virus spread and adjust travel restrictions accordingly.

Also among this group, 53 percent have banned or are considering banning home-share accommodations like Airbnb, while 43 percent have done so for serviced apartments, and one-third include stays with family or friends on the banned or would-be banned list. Only 12 percent have banned or are considering banning hotels. About 43 percent and 42 percent have not made changes to their policy regarding hotels and stays with family and friends, respectively.

Vaccine Is Key

The Uniglobe survey showed virtual meetings becoming part of the fabric of corporate life, replacing at least some travel. While 12 percent of respondents expected no migration of travel to virtual meetings, about 30 percent of respondents said they expect up to 25 percent of their travel to move to virtual meetings even if a vaccine is broadly available by March. Nearly 26 percent of respondents expected between 25 and 50 percent of travel will move to virtual meetings. About 11 percent expect more than 50 percent of travel volume to be replaced by virtual meetings.

Should a vaccine become broadly available by March, 35 percent of survey respondents expected corporate travel volumes to increase for the following 12 months but predicted growth ultimately would plateau beneath pre-Covid levels. In contrast, 28 percent expected travel volumes to equal pre-Covid levels. ■

TripActions Bolsters Reserves with \$125 Million in Financing

BY ADAM PERROTTA

As travel management providers continue navigating stiff headwinds amid the ongoing shutdown of corporate travel, TripActions has added another \$125 million in financing to its coffers to help the company wait out the storm.

Led by Greenoaks Capital with participation from Vista Credit Partners, the financing is convertible to equity if and when TripActions undertakes an initial public offering, with “the value and timing of the IPO [to] determine the conversion rate into equity,” according to a TripActions spokesperson.

The latest \$125 million infusion gives TripActions a total of \$350 million in reserve, according to TripActions CEO Ariel Cohen—funds he said will be used to “weather Covid-19 while accelerating our investment in R&D and expanding enterprise sales.”

With the Covid-19 pandemic clamping a stranglehold on the business travel sector, the prospect of any travel management provider going the IPO route anytime soon seems slim. TripActions laid off nearly 300 employees after corporate travel screeched to a near-standstill in mid-March.

But TripActions since has reported signs that its clients’ travel activity is beginning to pick up, with total bookings increasing

The latest \$125 million infusion gives TripActions a total of \$350 million in reserve, according to TripActions CEO Ariel Cohen.

weekly for the past nine weeks and client surveys showing a steady increase in travelers’ comfort with making trips, the company said.

In the meantime, TripActions continues expanding its client base, claiming 265 new companies over the past three months, including three large enterprise customers, and doubling down on its Liquid payment card, signing up nearly 30 new clients for that product over the same period, the company said. TripActions also has bolstered its core platform, recently launching a Covid-19 tracker and adding supplier safety procedure information to its booking tool, along with a service to automatically manage and apply fee waivers stemming from unused air tickets.

TripActions last month also hired former Harness vice president of Europe, the Middle East and Africa Christopher Vik to head up its European sales operations, touting Vik’s track record of leading the growth of U.S.-based tech companies in Europe—a market where TripActions is emphasizing expansion efforts. ■

STR, Tourism Economics: Full U.S. Hotel Demand Recovery Pushed to 2023

BY DONNA M. AIROLDI

Despite week-over-week occupancy improvements for the past two months, the demand for U.S. hotels is not expected to recover to pre-pandemic levels until 2023, according to a revised forecast from STR and Tourism Economics.

“Compared with our last forecast, we actually improved our [year-over-year] demand projection for 2020 from -45 percent to -36.2 percent, but we expect it to take 11 quarters for the number of room nights sold to rise to the corresponding levels of 2019,” said STR SVP of lodging insights Jan Freitag. “Similarly, it will take until 2023 for occupancy to reach the 20-year historical average.”

With lower occupancy levels, and the likelihood of hoteliers discounting room rates to compete for market share, “average daily rate could show a slower recovery timeline even with more normalization each quarter,” Freitag said, noting that the 2021 ADR projection actually improved to 5.2 percent year-over-year growth from 1.7 percent in the prior forecast. “Despite this better growth rate next

year, we do not see ADR recovering to pre-2020 levels in the next five years.”

Overall, the outlook for 2020 has improved

slightly, while the projected recovery in 2021 likely will be slower than previously anticipated. The previous forecast projected a year-over-year revenue per available room decrease of 57.5 percent for 2020 and growth of 48 percent for 2021. The update shows there to be less of a RevPAR decline in 2020 (down 50.6 percent), but also slower growth in 2021 (40.6 percent). ■

STR, Tourism Economics U.S. Lodging Forecast (Year-Over-Year Change)

	2019 Actual	2020 Forecast	2021 Forecast
Supply	2%	-4.4%	5.5%
Demand	2%	-36.2%	35.4%
Occupancy*	-0.1%	-37.1%	33.7%
ADR	0.9%	-21.4%	5.2%
RevPAR*	0.8%	-50.6%	40.6%

*Reflects total-room-inventory methodology, which assumes no temporary hotel closures.
Sources: STR, Tourism Economics



Travelport CEO Webb on Financing, Covid-19

Travelport last month announced commitments of \$500 million in freshly available financing from affiliates of Siris Capital Group and the Elliott Management-affiliated Evergreen Coast Capital, the private equity partners that took the global distribution system operator private last year. Travelport has access to a further \$500 million in financing capacity, it announced. A longtime executive at Sabre, Greg Webb last summer joined Travelport from Oracle Hospitality to become CEO. He spoke with The Beat editor-in-chief Jay Boehmer last month to discuss navigating the Covid-19 crisis. Edited excerpts follow.

TRAVEL COMPANIES ARE FOCUSED ON LIQUIDITY AND KEEPING A COMFORTABLE RUNWAY, SO TO SPEAK. WHAT DOES THE NEW FINANCING AFFORD YOU?

Part of the difficulty for anybody in the travel space right now is, unlike anything we've seen before, this crisis has no baseline. It's easy to make decisions if you have a baseline on which to operate. If we knew what the recovery curve was going to look like, then it would be easy to make decisions. But we don't. We're operating in a world where, I assume, everybody has created a large number of scenarios. Then, as each week goes by, you bounce between those scenarios to go: "OK, it feels like we're landing here, and so I just should take these actions," or, "It looks like we're landing there, so I should take these actions."

For us, we needed financial flexibility into the future around how we would take those actions. We ultimately ended up getting to a deal that gives us effectively access to \$1 billion in liquidity, if needed. Now, we didn't need that much to start, and certainly I didn't want to pay interest on \$1 billion, so we only took an initial draw of \$220 million to give us runway and flexibility. We certainly have the ability to draw another \$280 million at our discretion whenever. But it all depends on the recovery model.

YOUR COMPETITORS HAVE ADDRESSED HOW LONG THEY CAN WITHSTAND A WORST-CASE TRAVEL ENVIRONMENT. GIVEN WHAT YOU HAVE ACCESS TO, HOW LONG CAN YOU WEATHER A SLOW RECOVERY?

It's a bit of a guessing game when you've got to pick a recovery scenario. The [recovery scenario] that we think is very conservative but also seems most likely at this point doesn't bring us back to 2019 numbers in 2021 in any shape or form. At current, we think we have more than enough cash to weather that period all the way through 2021. And we've done some restructuring already. We have a reduced workforce from when this started. But we feel very comfortable that we'll be in a place where we're cashflow-positive and no longer in need of outside liquidity at some point in 2021. We'll still have cash on hand from what we've drawn on the initial \$500 million.



"The [recovery scenario] that we think is very conservative but also seems most likely at this point doesn't bring us back to 2019 numbers in 2021 in any shape or form."

The Beat

DESPITE THE DEMAND ENVIRONMENT, HOW IS SOUTHWEST AIRLINES' PARTICIPATION GOING?

We only went live about a month ago, and as a ratio, it's been wildly successful. I can't say enough about Southwest as a partner. There was a lot to do here, because Southwest hadn't operated ever in a fully functioning GDS. There were a number of things that they had to do—the way they handle refunds and exchanges, the way they manage things in the background—that we had to adapt to. There was a lot of work between the two teams. It was a really great partnership. It's gone extraordinarily well. We have actually signed up new business because of agencies wanting access to Southwest. There were a number of agencies that signed on just for the Southwest business, but there are number of agencies that have actually done full conversions to the Travelport platform. We've had really good success.

WHAT'S TOP OF MIND FOR AIRLINES AND SUPPLIERS RIGHT NOW? WHAT ARE THEY ASKING OF A DISTRIBUTION PARTNER?

It's just general support. We've been working with airlines obviously on the huge amount of cancels that have come across and trying to make sure that was as efficient as possible. We've had a number of airlines that during this time period we would have been working feverishly to sign new long-term contracts with, where we've jointly decided: "I don't have time for it; you don't have time for it; let's just kick the can down the road," and so we've done extensions to let this settle out. We'll just do a short addendum and extend for some period of time on the same terms so that we both can come up for air. People just don't have time for it right now.

WHAT'S YOUR MACRO VIEW OF THE GDS SECTOR OR THE INDIRECT CHANNEL COMING OUT OF THIS? IS THIS A RESET OR A CATALYST FOR A BUSINESS MODEL CHANGE?

I don't know that this by itself drives a change to the distribution model. One of the things we've heard from airlines is that they continue to want to pursue their [New Distribution Capability] strategy, which doesn't surprise me. We've been supportive in how we allow airlines to market [and] merchandize. The question's going to be: What becomes important to consumers as we come out of this? It will certainly be different from what it was.

I don't know that it changes the GDS landscape necessarily. I think it changes potentially how quickly we need to adapt to change. If it's shown us anything, it's that one thing can change the entire environment overnight. One of the things that we've looked at is, How adaptable are we? How adaptable is the system? And how do we make sure it's as adaptable as possible? But I don't think this signals a fundamental change in distribution.

ARE YOU SEEING ANY SHIFT IN THE PACE OF NDC ADOPTION AND DEVELOPMENT?

The priority hasn't changed on the airline side, but we have, at least for a number of carriers, seen the pace change. The intent is still there. It's just that a lot of these guys, including us, are just trying to make sure that we can come up for a breath. I don't think they've changed strategies. I don't think they've changed direction. It's just there are bigger fish to fry, for lack of a better term. ■



Choice Hotels: We'll Need Suits, Not Just Boots, For True Recovery

Like most industry executives and analysts, Choice Hotels president and CEO Patrick Pacious thinks drive-to leisure travel will lead the Covid-19 recovery, but that a full recovery would be underway when business travel returns. For Pacious, that means drawing back both categories of Choice's business travelers: suits and boots.

"The suits are the professional services type firms who tend to stay in Comfort, Cambria and Ascend [properties]," Pacious said last month on a webinar for franchisees, held in lieu of the company's annual convention, which was to have taken place in May in New Orleans. "The boots travelers are those who can't work behind a laptop from a home environment. They may be in trucking, logistics, construction. That segment has continued to stay in our brands over the last three months, and that will continue. But the professional services traveler and getting them back on the road, that will depend on when large events and conventions come back into the equation. As most of our competitors have talked about, that will likely be next year or the following year."

The company has been reaching out to its corporate travel managers, and "their first question is about the virus and infections," Pacious said. "They want to know the staff and hotel are safe to be engaging with."

Choice sent a video showcasing its Commitment to Clean initiative not only across its social media and digital channels but also to all Choice Privileges members and corporate accounts, said Choice COO Robert McDowell.

"The other piece that is critical with us is the entire buying process through the corporate travel buyers is going to be focused on what we are doing around the Commitment to Clean," he added. "We'll be reinforcing that through the



Choice's Patrick Pacious

"The professional services traveler and getting them back on the road, that will depend on when large events and conventions come back into the equation."

[request-for-proposals] process, and communication will be critical."

The company also has been working with corporate meeting planners and travel buyers to conduct virtual tours of hotels, said Choice SVP of upscale brands Janis Cannon. "We're setting up virtual tours on how we are setting up meeting rooms, how we are approaching F&B, and that's driving early demand for us," she said. "We're helping hotels by not just coming up with the Commitment to Clean, but what do we need to do from a meetings and event perspective as well."

Occupancy Improving

Since the start of the pandemic, Choice Hotels' worst week in terms of occupancy was that of April 5, when the systemwide level was just 28 percent, Pacious said. As of May 31, the company's occupancy was just shy of 45 percent.

"Memorial Day weekend was relatively strong, and the weekend after was even stronger, which shows a pent-up demand for travel," he said.

The company's extended-stay brands have posted even higher occupancy levels. For March, Choice's extended-stay brands reported an average occupancy level of more than 68 percent, and in April it was 60 percent. The WoodSpring Suites brand achieved an average occupancy rate of more than 70 percent in May.

The extended-stay brands also outperformed in terms of revenue per available room, according to Choice. "Despite an industrywide RevPAR decline of nearly 52 percent in March and 80 percent in April, RevPAR for the company's extended-stay brands declined less than 14 percent and 29 percent, respectively," the company said.

As of the first quarter, Choice has 410 domestic extended-stay hotels open, representing nearly a 10 percent year-over-year increase, and currently has another 300 hotels in the pipeline. The company has opened 17 extended-stay hotels so far this year.

But things have not been all positive for the company during the pandemic. In April, the company furloughed about 15 percent of its domestic workforce for 60 days, and it is in the process of determining what will happen with those staff members as the furloughs expire on July 1, Pacious said. ■

Hilton Lays Off 22 Percent of Global Corporate Staff

Hilton Worldwide is cutting its global corporate staff by 22 percent, representing 2,100 people, and is extending for another three months the employee furloughs, reduced hours and pay cuts that were announced in late March.

The moves are a result of the devastat-

ing effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the hospitality industry, according to Hilton, and follow related announcements made by Marriott International and Hyatt Hotels Corp. in recent weeks.

"Never in Hilton's 101-year history has our industry faced a global crisis that brings

travel to a virtual standstill," said Hilton president and CEO Christopher Nassetta in a statement. "Hospitality will always be a business of people serving people, which is why I am devastated that to protect our business, we have been forced to take actions that directly impact our team members."

As announced in March, Nassetta will forego 100 percent of his salary for the remainder of the year, executive committee members' salaries have been reduced by 50 percent, and non-furloughed staff salaries have been reduced up to 20 percent. No additional salary cuts were made with this new announcement, according to a company spokesperson. ■

HRS Partners with SGS on New Hotel Hygiene Protocol

BY MOLLY DYSON

Corporate lodging platform HRS has partnered with global inspection, verification, testing and certification company SGS to develop a new cleanliness program for the hotel industry that provides labels for properties that meet hygiene standards.

The Clean & Safe Protocol sets out standards for hotel cleanliness during the coronavirus pandemic and beyond, and includes recommendations from the World Health Organization, World Travel and Tourism Council and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, as well as guidelines for meetings and groups as defined by the Research Institute for Exhibition and Live Communication.

According to HRS, a recent survey of its corporate clients revealed 86 percent will consider using only those hotels that can demonstrate enhanced cleaning measures as travelers prepare to get back on the road.

Measures in the protocol include improved hygiene services in public areas, guest and meeting rooms; extended infection prevention measures; guaranteed minimum distances; implementation of revised training programs for employees and suppliers; regular control and monitoring; and other measures.

According to Louis Fernandes, HRS managing director of Northern Europe, the Clean & Safe Protocol allows smaller independent hotels to follow a standard similar to programs being introduced by larger chains. “We will take individual protocols into account,” Fernandes told BTN, “but we wanted to provide a standard for all of our partners.”

Hotels can receive a label that shows corporates they have met the standards set out in the Clean & Safe Protocol, with two distinctions available: “Self-Inspected,” whereby properties can fill out an online assessment form that is then rated through an algorithm to determine if they pass or fail, or the “Expert Inspected” option, which involves a

86%

of business travelers will consider using only those hotels that can demonstrate enhanced cleaning measures, according to an HRS client survey.

digital or onsite assessment by an SGS representative. Hotels that have implemented their own measures and had them validated by an external audit partner can also receive this label. The Expert Inspected label can be displayed in the property and on its website and marketing materials.

Francesca Cerchia, global product manager at SGS, told BTN the company, which already partners with a number of hotels on both the property and chain level, collaborated with HRS to create 46 main questions for the Self-Inspected option. Questions cover measures such as how often high touch-points are disinfected, which cleaning products hotels are using and what properties are doing to limit contact among guests and staff, particularly in public areas. “There’s a certain level of flexibility built into the assessment because every property is different; we just wanted to develop a minimum level of protocols they should be following to reassure guests of their safety,” Cerchia said.

Cerchia also said she believes the new protocols will be a permanent fixture in hotels. “I think it would only be social distancing guidelines that go away if we get a vaccine for coronavirus. Really, these standards should always have been in use, and I think they have but maybe haven’t been monitored or vetted the way they will be moving forward. Covid-19 is just one of many possible infections, and I think a lot of hotels already had plans in place for outbreaks.”

HRS said there are already hotels in more than 40 countries listed on its sourcing and booking platforms with the Clean & Safe labels.

When asked whether he thought the certifications would go some way to reassuring travel managers and their travelers as businesses start to send employees back on the road, Fernandes said: “It depends on the company’s risk attitude, and it would also depend on their sector. For instance, the oil and gas industry has fairly strict risk protocols because that’s what they specialize in—keeping employees safe on the job—whereas other sectors might be a little more flexible.

“The point of Clean & Safe is to give both our hotel partners and our corporate clients the ability to choose what works for them. At the end of the day, the best way to fill rooms as hotels reopen is to gain consumer confidence, and we think the labels will help with that.” ■

IHG Projects 75 Percent Q2 RevPAR Decline

InterContinental Hotels Group anticipates a 75 percent year-over-year decline in second-quarter revenue per available room, resulting in a 52 percent RevPAR decrease for the first half of 2020 based on a comparable-hotel and constant-currency basis, the company announced. RevPAR declined 82 percent year over year in April and 76 percent in May, and is estimated to be down 70 percent for June.

“The smaller but steady improvements in RevPAR through the second quarter are

mostly attributed to the Americas franchised estate and the Greater China region,” the company said in a statement.

IHG includes U.S.-franchised and U.S.-managed divisions in its Americas region. The Q2 Americas RevPAR decline is estimated at 72 percent year over year. RevPAR for the U.S. franchise group, which is weighted toward domestic demand-driven mainstream hotels and non-urban markets and less on large group business, is anticipated

to decline 67 percent. This compares to a projected 87 percent second-quarter RevPAR decline for the U.S. managed division, which is weighted toward luxury and upper-upscale hotels in urban markets that “individually contribute higher fee revenue than a mainstream franchised hotel.”

Occupancy levels in comparable open hotels have improved to more than 40 percent in the United States, according to the company, adding that about 10 percent of its global portfolio remain closed. In the Americas, about 5 percent are closed, most being managed luxury and upscale hotels and those outside of the United States. In the Europe, Middle East, Africa and Asia region, 30 percent of hotels remain closed. In China, 1 percent are closed. ■



Hotels Add New Meetings Sanitization Protocols



Along with new sanitization standards, several hotel companies are implementing new procedures and protocols around their meetings and events—for whenever they return—related to the Covid-19 pandemic.

In addition to the company's All Stay Well initiative, **Accor** has launched All Meet Well for North and Central America. Elements include promoted social distancing in arrival and gathering areas; attendee screenings that may include temperature checks; food-and-beverage set-ups that allow for six feet between chairs; gloves and masks for all staff; sanitization of all furniture and equipment in meeting rooms before and after every event; increased availability of outdoor and private spaces; adding more disposable F&B accompaniments; elimination of all pre-set items on tables except for single-serve bottled water; elimination of all buffets and self-serve options; and larger, one-way aisles with directional signage.

As an enhancement to its Commitment to Clean initiative, **Choice Hotels** is redesigning furniture arrangements in its meeting and event spaces for social distancing in accordance with U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines. It also is adding signage and decals to meeting locations to reiterate the need for social distancing. The company's Cambria brand offers a contactless concierge text-messaging service, which guests and planners can use to request changes, for example, to thermostat settings, information technology or audiovisual support and food-and-beverage orders.

Hilton Worldwide has said it will roll out in July a complement to its CleanStay program dubbed Hilton EventReady with CleanStay, but hasn't yet released complete details. The program "will deliver cleanliness, flexibility, safe and socially responsible solutions, along with creative food and beverage, the latest technology and sustainable practices," according to Hilton.

Hyatt Hotels Corp.'s meeting and event programming is being built off its Global Care & Cleanliness Commitment, said Hyatt SVP of events Steve Enselein in an email. A few examples

of the enhancements include sharing virtual hotel tours; collaborating with its AV providers to elevate hybrid meeting options to support large-scale events within social distancing guidelines; using meetings technology firm Cvent's Social Tables tool to collaborate with planners to arrange room layouts for social distancing; temporarily shifting from buffets to a la carte menus and made-to-order options at full-service restaurants; providing individually pre-packaged items at select-service properties with breakfast buffets; placing hand sanitizer stations at the entrance of event venues; making masks and gloves available to attendees; and temporarily suspending distribution of pads, pens and other items that cannot be easily sanitized.

Loews Hotels' enhanced safety and cleanliness protocols, released in May, covered meetings and events. The current protocols are based on gatherings of 50 or fewer attendees, and include classroom-style room settings with two people per six-foot table, including adequate space in front and behind each row; buffets replaced with individually wrapped containers and utensils; coffee, tea and accompaniments served by staff; beverages served where possible in single-serve vessels; lines for bars and meals marked to adhere to physical distancing; and meals served in the same room as the meeting.

Marriott International's cleanliness commitment covers all areas of the hotel, including meetings and events, said Marriott SVP global sales Tammy Routh in an email. The company also is working with "industry organizations such as the Events Industry Council to find ways to instill trust and confidence in bringing back meetings and events." In addition, Marriott is working with groups to incorporate new technology, such as live-streaming support, and to offer touchless options via Marriott's meeting services app. Like other companies, Marriott will replace self-service buffets with grab-and-go items, and meeting set-ups will adhere to social distancing protocols. New room set-up charts will support social distancing as well. Future recommendations, based on new mandates and guidelines, include working with planners to determine room set-ups while ensuring physical distancing and, if buffets return, ensuring they will be attended and served by staff.

Radisson Hotel Group has introduced a 20-step protocol for cleaning and a 10-step one for meeting and event spaces. Some elements that differ from the overall sanitization initiative include door hangers in each meeting room with cleaning and disinfecting information; the placement of a "disinfectant box" in meeting rooms for used stationery items to be disinfected after use; ensuring physical distancing in all meeting facilities; sanitizing stations in all meeting spaces; ensuring that the hotel event manager is available via a planner's personal device to assist with requests; and frequently cleaning and disinfecting coffee machines. ■



Bizly Enhances Platform for Virtual and Hybrid Meeting Planning

Meetings technology solution Bizly has expanded its platform to allow for planning virtual and hybrid meetings, particularly simple, self-service events, the company told BTN. The virtual meetings feature went live last month, giving planners three event options to select—in-person, virtual or hybrid.

The platform is agnostic when it comes to which third-party virtual meetings tool a client chooses. “Whether Webex, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, etc., we are compatible with all the different videoconferencing technologies,” said Bizly CEO Ron Shah. “It works alongside whatever you are using.”

One reason for that is data security. “We want to be able to enable a certain level of comfort for [companies], so we are not facilitating something that may breach their security protocols,” said Bizly chief strategy officer Kevin Iwamoto. “It’s easier to allow the company to make the vetting and the choices and selection of that third-party provider and be able to integrate with their corporate solution.”

The tool also provides guidance for the planner on setting up and facilitating a virtual meeting and turning on security settings, and offers best practices for communication with attendees, like sharing pre-meeting materials and event facilitation notes.

“One part of our value-add is helping the organizer do [virtual meetings] better, no matter how much experience they have or don’t have,” Shah said.

Another benefit is having the ability to organize a hybrid event in one place. “Instead of setting up two workstreams or two systems, one virtual and then trying to patch that into the smaller [in-person] meeting, you have one place to set the whole thing up,” Iwamoto said.

“One part of our value-add is helping the organizer do [virtual meetings] better, no matter how much experience they have or don’t have.”

—BIZLY’S RON SHAH

In addition, invitations for hybrid meetings allow participants to select whether they will attend in person or virtually, so planners can adjust accordingly.

Soon, Bizly will begin to require venues that respond to inquiries to provide their health and safety protocols using a checklist that the company created based on U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines.

Meanwhile, “a recent [Professional Convention Management Association] study found that 51 percent of more than 1,000 people polled said smaller, local events will be the first to return,” Iwamoto said. “Our goal and sense of urgency is centered around modifying our platform to be action ready for these small, local meetings when companies start calling people back. ... We want to use the current opportunity to build the infrastructure to support those meetings while buyers have the time to focus on this.”

Iwamoto added, however, that too many companies don’t understand the dynamics of a simple meeting, and they treat it like a regular meeting, “but it is not, because the end users are not meeting planners or full-time travel professionals,” he said. “The end users are administrative assistants and other people who do this on a part-time basis.”

He also said that a lot of companies still do not have a policy, process or technology around planning small, local meetings, dealing with new protocols and regulatory agencies, adhering to social distancing, sanitization and the ability to see where people are meeting and how many people attend.

“It’s mind-boggling to me, if you are a program owner, why you wouldn’t use Covid as a compelling event to get your arms around managing this space,” Iwamoto said. “But they haven’t planned for it. When the business comes back, and in the absence of a policy, a process, a technological solution to facilitate this, it will go right back to pre-Covid, which is everybody doing their own thing. ... [A]nd without a solution to capture and report on [simple meetings] on a regular basis, you will be behind the 8-ball, and I would question what kind of value you are really adding to senior management in being able to communicate the actual situation to date of where the company is and where the employees are.” ■

Survey: Most Planners Now Don’t Expect In-Person Meetings in 2020

Meeting planner confidence that face-to-face meetings will resume in 2020 significantly has dimmed over the past month, according to i-Meet’s weekly Planner Confidence Index online survey of 291 planners.

The percentage of respondents who expect to restart face-to-face meetings during the fourth quarter fell from 38 percent on May 18 to 25 percent for the week ending June 21. The percentage of surveyed plan-

ners who think events won’t return until 2021 jumped from 38 percent to 61 percent during this period.

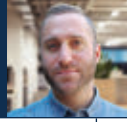
About 73 percent of corporate planners who completed last week’s survey indicated they expect to resume in-person events in 2021, compared with 20 percent who plan to do so in the fourth quarter. This aligns with third-party meeting manager respondents, at 69 percent and 21 percent, respectively. ■

When Do You Expect to Resume Operating Face-to-Face Events?

Survey Week Ending

	April 6	May 18	June 21
Before May 31	4%	0%	—
June-July	24%	4%	1%
Aug.-Sept.	29%	12%	8%
Oct.-Dec.	20%	38%	25%
2021	8%	38%	61%
Uncertain	15%	8%	5%

Source: i-Meet March 31-April 6, May 12-18 and June 15-21 surveys of meeting planners



Expensify Adds Booking Service to Payment Card Platform

With business travel projected to begin re-emerging over the coming months, expense management and corporate payment provider Expensify is getting into the booking game, rolling out a virtual assistant through which travelers can book flights, hotels and rental cars via chat or email.

Dubbed Concierge Travel, the service is available for free to all holders of the Expensify Card, the payment tool the company launched last year. Rather than charging a per-booking or subscription fee for the booking service, Expensify earns a percentage of the interchange fee paid by the supplier accepting payment via the card. The card is offered as a complimentary service under both Expensify's \$5 per user and \$9 per user service plans.

Concierge Travel includes complimentary Covid-19 alerts and risk assessment services from travel security and medical specialist Global Rescue for all bookings, according to Expensify. International travelers also receive a destination report containing virus-related destination details, such as entry and exit requirements for their country of travel. Travel managers can set parameters and policy controls based on risk assessments and other factors, such as fare classes and star ratings for hotels.

Concierge Travel is starting off with live agents working behind the scenes to fulfill bookings, with fully automated fulfillment expanding as the system's artificial intelligence becomes more advanced, said Expensify CEO David Barrett. Agents will book travel through public online travel agencies, according to Expensify.

The launch of Concierge Travel is the latest major addition to Expensify's service line, following the October 2019 debut of the Expensify Card. Bringing expense management, payment cards and booking under one roof helps fulfill the company's mission of simplifying corporate travel and expense management, according to Barrett.

"Our priority has always been to make the entire expense management process as easy as possible for the end user, and housing all of these services within Expensify makes for the smoothest experience imaginable," Barrett noted.

"A user can simply chat Concierge with a booking request ... and it takes care of the rest," he continued. "During your trip, you just swipe the card without worrying about receipts and get an instant notification on your phone if an expense needs more details. After the trip, all the heavy lifting of receipt tracking and expense management has been done, so you can focus on literally anything else." ■

Rather than charging a per-booking or subscription fee for the booking service, Expensify earns a percentage of the interchange fee paid by the supplier accepting payment via the card.

Luxe Inks Zeno Reseller Deal, ZS Associates Implements

BY ADAM PERROTTA & JAY BOEHMER

Luxe Travel Management has signed on as a reseller of Serko's Zeno booking and expense management tool in North America, with consulting and professional services firm ZS Associates the first Luxe client to roll out Zeno to its employees.

ZS Associates meetings and travel manager Suzanne Boyan, BTN's 2019 Travel Manager of the Year, said ZS chose Zeno in part because of its ability to handle New Distribution Capability content.

"That was important because we all have to prepare for NDC and prepare our travelers for it, too," Boyan said.

Zeno, which has received Level 3 NDC certification by the International Air Transport Association, offers NDC content through deals with Southwest Airlines and Qantas.

ZS's implementation of Zeno took place within the Zeno Labs program, under which ZS employees tested the tool and provided feedback on functionality and user experience ahead of the full rollout to ZS's North American team, which is scheduled for August.

The reseller deal with Luxe was part of Serko's TMC Community Program, which offers travel management companies that sign reseller agreements for Zeno benefits such as accelerated onboarding, deferred implementation fees and no minimums until 2021, along with referral commissions.

Last year, ZS chose Luxe to support the company's omnichannel strategy, which combines the use of the TMC channel with direct booking. In January 2020, Luxe was acquired by Frosch International Travel.

Serko since March has added travel management companies Acendas, Balboa Travel, Ovation Travel Group and Radius Travel as Zeno resellers.

Serko in the past 12 months has "invested heavily in our Zeno platform for expansion into North America," according to the company's annual report, released last month. Serko is publicly traded and dual-listed in Australia and New Zealand.

During its fiscal year ending March 31, booking transactions in the U.S. began to register "following the transition of several travel management resellers from pilot phase to onboarding their first corporate customers," according to the report.

Yet, in the wake of Covid-19, North American "transactions have effectively ceased," the report noted. Further, "travel management reseller onboarding slowed materially in the last quarter owing to the impact of Covid-19 and we expect further corporate onboarding to be slow until travel resumes in that market."

Serko is continuing development on Zeno in North America to expand local supplier content and fine-tune reseller integrations.

In a Q&A during Serko's earnings call with investors and analysts, CEO Darrin Grafton said Serko's contractual concessions with TMCs "have a slight impact on final revenue numbers, but in the scheme of where we're trying to get to from a global business, that short-term impact is nothing compared to the long-term relationships that we've worked on over the last decade." ■

Troovo Virtual Card Tech Comes to Amadeus B2B Wallet

Travel management companies making supplier payments via virtual cards within the Amadeus B2B Wallet now can generate cards automatically using technology from Troovo, the companies announced last month. The new global integration of Troovo's Robotic Process Automation service automates the entire virtual payment process, with card generation and the flow of payment data from TMC booking tools into airline or hotel payment systems accomplished via software.

Automating the virtual card payment process enables TMCs using B2B Wallet to benefit from the advantages of virtual cards—including greater security, spending controls and more complete spending data—while avoiding the inefficiencies and potential for error inherent in relying on human-powered processes to manually generate cards and enter payment data into supplier systems, the companies said.

Both of those factors are expected to be points



of increased emphasis for TMCs as travel resumes in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, according to the firms.

“As things come back, travel agencies will need to ensure they’re as efficient as possible in all facets of their business, including making payments out to suppliers,” Troovo CEO Kurt Knackstedt said in a statement. “We’re helping them do that by automating the workflows that drive those payments.”

And as TMCs’ corporate clients seek out their own efficiencies post-Covid, virtual cards’ ability to capture complete travel spending data will be at a premium, added Damian Alonso, head of payer services for Amadeus.

“One of the main benefits of virtual card technology is the rich amount of data you can associate to each individual virtual card,” said Alonso. “All of that data can be automatically captured and flow through to the customer to help reconcile their payments with the booking activity they’ve done.”

In January, Troovo integrated its RPA technology into Mastercard’s In Control for Business Travel platform, which delivers virtual cards for use in corporate travel bookings. The Australia-based virtual card specialist followed up that deal in February with a partnership with hotel room wholesaler WebBeds. Troovo also racked up integration pacts in late 2019 with Flight Centre Travel Group and mobile travel technology specialist MTrip. ■

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CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

GBTA Names Dave Hilfman Interim CEO

tions against him, which Solombrino has rejected as categorically false. Amid a national reckoning of issues of race and inclusion, however, several GBTA committees, supplier partners and buyer members had vowed that Solombrino's removal as CEO would be a necessary, though not necessarily exclusive, step to retain their participation.

The uproar was triggered by an anonymous email alleging misconduct by Solombrino circulating among industry insiders last month. Sent to BTN June 12, the letter claims, among other misdeeds, that Solombrino created a hostile working environment for women and racial minorities and has enriched himself and board members with a continuous string of luxury hotel stays and high-end perks, while denying basic expense reimbursements to GBTA staff. It also alleges negligence among senior staff—particularly, EVP Lisa Censullo, who joined GBTA from Solombrino's previous company, Dav El Boston Coach—as well as among board members for allowing Solombrino's conduct to go unchecked and even for rewarding it. Solombrino in May was promoted to CEO in a unanimous vote by the board, even as one-third of GBTA's staff was laid off or furloughed.

The whistleblowers' letter, which was signed "current & former GBTA Staff," alleged a number of ongoing and specific incidents. Namely, it cited "racist, divisive and derogatory comments" against minority groups and women. It claimed ongoing derogatory references to past and present staff, board members, buyer members, vendors and media, along with comments directed to staff like "you are crazy, you are insane, you are stupid, idiot, you are boring," and Solombrino's declarations that GBTA is not a democracy and that "they [the board] don't care and they let me do whatever I want." The letter noted a lack of intervention from Censullo.

The whistleblowers claimed high staff turnover rates since Solombrino took his leadership role in May 2019 and, in particular, the firing of four Black women even as GBTA said it was hiring a new communications VP. The letter also questioned Solombrino's and Censullo's extensive travel schedules, including their demand for luxury accommodations at St. Regis hotels and high-end meals. Whistleblowers also accused Solombrino of signing chauffeured car service contracts that would enrich his family members.

Whistleblowers urged the current board of directors to take action on the allegations.

The board hired New York-based law firm Polsinelli to conduct an internal investigation, but it was not clear whether they acted prior to the story breaking in *The Company Dime*. That outlet substantiated some of the claims in the anonymous complaint by obtaining an internal email sent by Scott Solombrino

Conflict of interest disclosure:

The BTN Group, particularly its Conferences & Events division and the Business Travel Show in the UK, competes for market share with GBTA's annual convention and its regional conferences, which could be considered a conflict of interest in reporting this article. The mission of Business Travel News as a journalism outlet is to provide readers with access to critical, unbiased managed travel industry news and analysis.

no on June 7 that berated staff and hurled invective about Colorado Gov. Jared Polis, possibly concerning GBTA's annual convention at the Denver Convention Center Nov. 6-11. GBTA would not confirm the fate of the convention when BTN inquired on June 18. The association said only that an announcement would be made "shortly."

In the meantime, GBTA hired PR firm Leibowitz Solo to manage the evolving reputational situation. The Leibowitz Solo website promotes "crisis communications that diminishes your worst story."

BTN contacted Leibowitz Solo on June 18 to demonstrate the board's commitment to running a thorough investigation, which would include the board's own governing effectiveness. The firm returned the following statement at that time:

"The GBTA Board has the utmost confidence in the organization's executive leadership team. We're proud of what this team has accomplished, especially amid an unprecedented pandemic that continues to impact the travel industry worldwide. At the same time, GBTA stands fully committed to providing every one of our team members with a respectful work environment, a workplace free from all forms of unlawful harassment and discrimination."

"GBTA takes very seriously any allegation of workplace conduct inconsistent with our commitment to professionalism. GBTA's Board is aware of an anonymous, unsubstantiated complaint regarding some of its employees. In response, the Board has initiated an independent, comprehensive third-party review of the allegations contained in that complaint. The executive leadership team is cooperating fully with this review, which we hope will be completed in an expedited manner."

Further, the firm sent a response to the allegations, attributed to Solombrino and pushing back on the complaint.

"In business and as a leader, I've always treated the men and women around me with honesty and fairness. While at times I may need to choose my words more carefully, in my 44-year career, I've never faced a single workplace complaint, let alone anything like the allegations contained in these anonymous emails."

"I've been cooperating fully with GBTA's internal review, and I will continue to do so. I will also continue to support and work hard for organizations like WINiT. As one of the organization's earliest supporters, I've always done what I can to make sure women in the travel industry have every opportunity to move forward in their careers. This commitment isn't window dressing; I believe in my heart that no one should be treated unequally – ever."

"I hope that the decades I've spent 'walking the walk' count at least as much as these anonymous accusations – a smear campaign that I strongly reject as false."

Nevertheless, with pressure mounting, the GBTA board confirmed in a late-night email to members dated June 19 that the organization had placed Solombrino on administrative leave, effective immediately, while a deeper review of the matter would be ongoing.

Supplier Support Drifts Away

Since the allegations went public last month, some suppliers distanced themselves from the association.

SAP Concur chief marketing officer Chris Juneau wrote in a June 22 blog post that his company had severed ties with GBTA until future notice. He wrote, "... we have terminated our relationship with the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA) on the national and the international levels. We have been deeply troubled by recent allegations about misogyny in its workplace, incendiary comments toward an elected official by its chief executive officer and reports of a hostile work environment. While we believe in due process and will not pre-judge the outcome of this ongoing situation, we are resigning our corporate membership and executive committee seats. We will not be involved with GBTA until we are convinced the underlying issues have been fully addressed."

Travel management company heavyweight CWT followed suit later in the month, citing the slow pace of the investigation. Effective June 30, the firm withdrew its company support and canceled all individual participation in the "GBTA board, committees, events or projects, plus any individual memberships which are paid for directly, or indirectly, by CWT," according to a letter sent to GBTA board chair Christle Johnson and signed by CWT VP and head of external communications and public relations Julian Walker. CWT left the door open for future re-engagement with the GBTA, "pending a satisfactory outcome of the enquiries," which would "depend entirely on whether the organization is able to demonstrate clearly that it is, to our thinking, fit and proper to represent our industry."

Prior to the current accusations, GBTA had lost supplier support based on Solombrino's public behaviors. Private car service provider Blacklane dropped its GBTA 2020 exhibition sponsorship in January, following the emergence of a panel discussion captured on video during a January 21, 2019, Limo University LAB Live meeting in Nashville. During that panel, Solombrino pushed his political views and called out the "crazy broads" and "lunatics" who participated in the Women's March in Washington, D.C., the previous day.

Blacklane CEO Jens Wohltorf cited this and other incendiary remarks in the video in a letter to the GBTA board chair that outlined why the firm decided to distance itself from Solombrino and his views that "undermine and overshadow the great work" of other members and aspects of GBTA, according to the memo. Though the LAB Live session occurred prior to Solombrino's current leadership role at the association, he served as GBTA's Allied Leadership Council president at that time and sat on the board.

Festive Road withdrew its GBTA exhibition participation in February, prior to the Covid-19 pandemic fully spreading throughout Europe and North America. Managing partner Paul Tilstone told BTN, "Every supplier needs to consider its own position based on its own values. From our point of view, before 'the email' we were already uncomfortable with various GBTA positions, so Festive Road withdrew from the convention as soon as GBTA applied surcharges to exhibitors to pay for the opening reception. It wasn't the cost of the surcharge, but the principle. And it's this overall attitude that concerns a number of the members."



"I hope that the decades I've spent 'walking the walk' count at least as much as these anonymous accusations – a smear campaign that I strongly reject as false."

—SCOTT SOLOMBRINO

Organizational Structure & Transparency Under Scrutiny

Nearly everyone BTN interviewed for this report said the issues at GBTA extend beyond Solombrino. The board, they said, needed to review its governance and would need to provide more transparency about its decision-making—not just going forward, but also going back to the process of hiring Solombrino and the board's unanimous decision, according to a GBTA press release, to promote Solombrino to CEO even as the company laid off a third of its workforce.

"This is a board that already had issues around the succession question," said ARC CEO Mike Premo, referring to Solombrino's appointment to executive director and COO last May, which did not include a full-scale executive search. "There were questions around Scott's succession to the role, and the board's lack of transparency on that topic was not helpful to Scott or GBTA. The board needs to up their game here."

Premo suggested inexperience might be an issue for some GBTA board members.

"A lot of times this is the first board people served on—whether it's ARC or an organization like GBTA," he said. "It's not intuitive how people should behave and what their duties and responsibilities are. And how effective boards should behave." He added that ARC supports board education programs at organizations like the National Association of Corporate Directors. "We are very big into board education, and I would hope at a minimum, GBTA would have their directors enroll in that kind of education so they can represent this fantastic industry in the way we all expect."

Tilstone, a former GBTA board member who said he stepped down early from his term in frustration, agreed that board issues extend back farther than Solombrino's tenure as GBTA's senior executive.

"It's the very construct of the board that needs to change as well as any other more immediate action that's needed [regarding the allegations]," he said. "The GBTA board should, therefore, implement a root-and-branch review of its practices and work to establish a format which ensures fresh people, fresh thinking and a deeper connection with its membership. ... Without it, GBTA will struggle."

Anthem director of global travel and meetings Cindy Heston said she for many years had found working with the organization difficult and that the dysfunction of the board, lack of transparency around board elections and other organizational intrigue exhausted her patience years ago. She quit the organization three years ago.

"I had mounting concerns about overall structure and transparency [of the organization]," Heston said. "When you are at GBTA [convention], 50 percent of the discussion is about the nonsense that was going on at GBTA," she added. "If your leadership knew what was really going on with that organization, would they look at you and say they were proud of your participation? Would they say your time, resources, energy spent there is valuable and justified? When you can't look your leadership in the eye and say you are proud to be a part of the association, it's time to cancel the membership."

Now, the entire Anthem travel team has withdrawn membership from the organization and quit committees they were involved with. Takeda head of global travel, meetings and events, fleet, and

aviation Michelle De Costa told BTN her team had withdrawn participation as well. Kim Hamer Kaye, a longtime buyer and industry consultant, took a new role recently as a buyer for a payment company. She told BTN her membership is about to lapse, and she would not renew.

Two critical GBTA volunteer committees also took a stand. Both the Accommodations Committee and the Risk Committee in June suspended their participation in the organization, pending the outcome of the investigation. The Accommodations Committee withheld Covid-19-related deliverables requested by GBTA. Committee chair Mira Rosenzweig told BTN, “We do not feel comfortable putting GBTA’s name on it until there is a resolution.” She added each member of the committee would determine his or her own future with the organization.

The Risk Committee, on the other hand, threatened to resign en masse, according to a memo obtained by BTN and authenticated by committee co-chair Ray Greeves, who declined further comment beyond saying the memo “speaks for itself.”

One committee member who requested anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter told BTN, “There’s no acceptable outcome vis-a-vis Scott remaining in the organization, and the entire committee feels this unanimously.” The source cited, “many people I’ve talked to rail on about this guy’s behavior over the years—not just now—and it’s so disturbing, if even half is true.”

Waiting for Due Process

Other participants and supplier sponsors weren’t ready to pull the plug. They wanted to wait for the investigation to take its course and give the existing board a chance to make things right.

A spokesperson for BCD Travel provided the following statement attributed to BCD Travel president and CEO John Snyder.

“We will not pre-judge anyone, but the allegations around Scott Solombrino are troubling. BCD Travel supports a thorough investigation into the matter. BCD Travel has had a long partnership with GBTA, and we support the many great people who work or volunteer for the organization. We are fully committed to ensuring that its leaders represent the strong values BCD Travel holds dear, and that they serve the travel industry with the utmost character and professionalism.”

ARC’s Premo was another leader looking for the story to unfold before deciding whether to break a decades-long relationship with GBTA.

“I find myself often sympathetic with CEOs, having been one twice. And, honestly, I’ve found myself similarly situated, with allegations made about me and my company sent to my board,” said Premo. “They were baseless. My board reacted much the same to how the GBTA board has reacted—to bring in a third party and investigate. Ultimately, those allegations were unfounded. If that had gone public the way this has, however, it would have been damaging to me and to ARC. Speaking from a personal standpoint, I’m happy to be patient here and let the process unfold. GBTA deserves that, the board deserves that and Scott deserves that.”

With the outcome of GBTA’s internal investigation currently unclear, it is unknown whether Solombrino’s departure from the organization is with cause

or at will. What is clear, however, is that his replacement has a challenging journey ahead. According to initial industry reaction, veteran industry executive Hilfman, who is coming out of retirement to take the interim CEO position, could have the personal and professional qualifications to bring the organization back together.

Turning the Page

Hilfman is regarded throughout the industry for his integrity and inclusiveness. He most recently served as SVP of worldwide sales for United Airlines, the position he held at the time of his 2018 retirement. He is a 30-plus-year veteran of the airline industry and a recently appointed board member for travel technology provider NuTravel as well as midmarket travel management company Direct Travel. BTN three times has named Hilfman among its annual “25 Most Influential Executives” list; GBTA awarded him its Icon award in 2017.

Longtime friend Susan Lichtenstein, now managing partner at DigiTravel Consulting, described Hilfman in an email as “[the guy] everyone in the room wants to get close to. He always listens first and then determines the next steps. He’s a great leader [who] removes obstacles in the path of others, empowers them to grow and learn and celebrates their wins as if they were his own. Dave is that leader. He leaves every room better than it was when he walked in.”

His extroverted personality, deep industry knowledge and extensive network may provide the salve to heal relationships with key suppliers. With Hilfman’s appointment, other major suppliers poised to take similar action have already reversed course and will now continue to support the organization, according to a source close to the matter.

GBTA will also bank on Hilfman’s leadership qualities to repair the rifts with volunteer committees and the larger community of buyer members.

With all the perceived positives that come with Hilfman’s interim appointment, some industry observers are noting its temporary nature. They said GBTA should use that time to rebuild its structure, yet current bylaws and vastly increase transparency into board activities, elections and future appointments to key positions within the organization.

“From a strategic perspective ... Dave has nothing but admirers, followers and friends, so he’s certainly a good pick for the interim,” said Partnership Travel Consulting founder and CEO Andy Menkes. “But I’d like to believe [the board will] go through a formal and open process to identify a permanent replacement. That would start with posting the position on their job board.”

Until then, the managed travel industry’s eyes will be on Hilfman to turn GBTA’s fortunes around, with an emphasis on inclusion and transparency. Some big players are ready to help him.

“Delta is an inclusive and diverse organization and we believe in treating others with dignity and respect and expect our partners to do the same,” said Delta SVP global sales Bob Somers in an email. “We are pleased with the board’s decision to appoint Dave Hilfman as the interim CEO. ... We know he will bring his wealth of experience to this new role. His leadership and integrity is unquestioned, and he has the full support of our organization.” ■

“Dave has nothing but admirers, followers and friends, so he’s certainly a good pick for the interim. But I’d like to believe [the board will] go through a formal and open process to identify a permanent replacement.”

—PARTNERSHIP TRAVEL CONSULTING’S ANDY MENKES

Professional Survival: How to Continue Delivering Value During the Covid-19 Pandemic

BY KEVIN IWAMOTO

Since the onset of Covid-19 and its devastating effects on the lives of millions around the world, I've had many conversations with travel and meeting and event buyers and suppliers and have done my fair share of webinars and discussions about what's happened and what can we expect when restrictions are lifted.

What continues to baffle me is when companies and individuals say, "All travel and meetings are canceled and/or postponed, so there's not much we can do." Are you kidding me? As a veteran of this industry as a buyer and supplier, the one thing I can assure you is if you aren't continually demonstrating your strategic value and skills as a category leader, you will never get the respect and valuation you crave from your executives. You are paving the way for your company to diminish your contributions and value. You are setting yourself up to be furloughed until things pick up or, worse, to be let go permanently.

Don't believe me? I recently asked some executive friends who aren't in the hospitality industry but hold key decision-making roles in their organizations who clearly don't recognize the value of a well-managed strategic travel and meetings program. I had to convince one of them to not let their travel manager go because he didn't see the value of the position and felt



Kevin Iwamoto is Chief Strategy Officer for Bizly. He is a former travel manager at Hewlett-Packard, executive at Starcite, Active Network and Lanyon, and president and CEO of the National Business Travel Association.

he could outsource it to their agency to not only reduce cost but also headcount for what he described as a "non-essential" role. Ouch!

During the Covid-19 pandemic, if you are not proactively working on your travel and meetings programs and how they will change—everything from policies, processes, preferred suppliers, post-Covid negotiation strategies, relaunching communications, and collaborating with HR, legal, administration, procurement, finance and more—then you haven't advanced the strategic value of your role and corporate contributions. Ask yourself honestly: If you were the corporate executive overseeing this area, based on your current work contributions, would you keep or cut this position? As one travel manager friend of mine said to me out of personal concern, "It's not helping me to keep my job when there's only about five tickets a week being issued."

I realize it is scary to go out on a limb and hypothesize about what the world is going to look like for your company coming out of Covid-19 and cranking up the engine to start getting back to business, but that day is coming, and you have a choice to make.

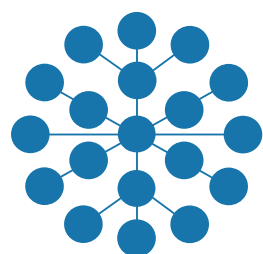
1. "I'll be brave and use my experiences and learnings to help the company craft new policies and processes to come out of this pandemic and get back to business."
2. "I don't know what's going to happen and I don't want to take risks, so I'll just wait and see what happens and what others are doing, and then I'll take action."

It is scary to go out on a limb and hypothesize about what the world is going to look like for your company coming out of Covid-19, but that day is coming, and you have a choice to make.

The first option says that you are a valuable strategic contributor, and your help and guidance will generate positive notice of your role and capabilities. The second option says you are a tactical contributor that could be outsourced with little to no negative impact to the company and doing so will provide cost savings. The bottom line is this: Companies do not outsource strategy, but they will outsource tactical work skills, no matter how excellent your skills may be. Choose your options wisely as keeping your job is what's at stake. ■

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