

VOLUME 37 | AUGUST 17, 2020 WWW.BUSINESSTRAVELNEWS.COM

BTN

BUSINESS TRAVEL NEWS

AEROPLAN

A MORE REWARDING AEROPLAN PROGRAM IS ON THE HORIZON.

LAUNCHING NOVEMBER 8



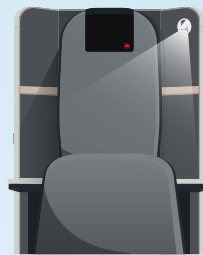
AEROPLAN

WITH EXCITING NEW FEATURES AND BENEFITS, GET READY TO TRAVEL MORE AND TRAVEL BETTER.



MADE FOR FAMILIES

Share points and make memories sooner with AeroPlan Family Sharing.



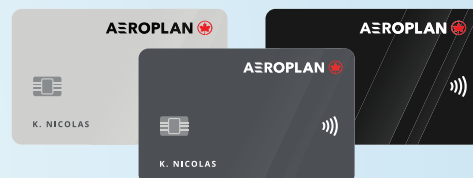
MADE FOR EXTRAS

Use your points for travel perks, like upgrading to business class.



MADE FOR EXPLORING

Every seat, on every Air Canada flight available in cash, is also available in points. No restrictions.



MADE FOR RECOGNITION

Eligible AeroPlan credit cards get you perks and travel benefits throughout your journey with Air Canada.



MADE FOR PEACE OF MIND

Change your plans easily, with the most flexible change and cancellation policies on flight rewards.



MADE FOR TRANSPARENCY

No surprises at check-out. We cover cash surcharges for flight rewards with Air Canada.

FOR MORE DETAILS ABOUT THE TRANSFORMED AEROPLAN PROGRAM VISIT [AIRCANADA.COM/AEROPLAN](https://aircanada.com/aeroplan)



BTN

BUSINESS TRAVEL NEWS



MEETINGS MANAGEMENT REPORT

When will meetings return and in what form? This BTN special report answers burning questions.

PAGE 11



LODGING

Wydham SVP global sales Carol Lynch talks about the appeal of virtual card-enabled direct billing, particularly for SME customers.

PAGE 16



DISTRIBUTION

Southwest Airlines stops distribution talks with Sabre in favor of energizing the agreements and momentum it has with other GDS providers.

PAGE 20

TOP STORY



BY CHRIS DAVIS

Darkening Skies

A U.S. COVID-19 SPIKE SCUTTLES HOPES OF QUICK INDUSTRY RECOVERY

Shaken by the relentless summertime spread of Covid-19 through the United States and some other countries and the dire implications that holds for business travel, suppliers—airlines, especially—are recognizing that the worst-case recovery scenarios of March increasingly are becoming the new normal of August.

The coronavirus' alarming march through the U.S. South and West, Brazil, India and Russia, along with flareups in Japan and other parts of Europe, shattered any industry faith in a quick recovery to pre-pandemic patterns and persuaded many that a true return to business travel could well depend on the development of a Covid-19 vaccine.

It's true that not all business travel has been entirely scuttled; domestic drive-to business has held up to an extent, fueled by essential workers and industries like

FULL STORY ON PAGE 24

EU Hits Travel Data Transfer

BY AMON COHEN

Travel managers worldwide must take immediate action to ensure their European travelers' personal data is transferred lawfully outside the European Union, the German travel management association VDR has warned. VDR issued its advice after the Court of Justice of the European Union invalidated Privacy Shield, a legal framework intended to safeguard imports of personal data from the EU to the U.S. in compliance with Europe's more stringent standards. The same judgment, issued on July 16, also effectively cast doubt on the viability of another data protection procedure known as standard contractual clauses.

The problem is pressing for corporate travel because the sector is dominated by U.S.-based companies. "Travel managers should assume passenger name record data linked to any travel reservation will end up in the U.S.," said Hans-Ingo Biehl, executive director for VDR.

The EU and U.S. in 2016 introduced Privacy Shield to replace Safe Harbor, a framework also invalidated

by the ECJ in 2015 for insufficient robustness. Although Privacy Shield included more protections than its predecessor, data privacy experts and indeed VDR warned from the outset it was likely to fail judicial scrutiny for similar reasons. Even so, 5,300 companies were active signatories to Privacy Shield when the ECJ invalidated it, including more than a dozen travel management companies and numerous other travel businesses.

Guidance issued last month by the European Data Protection Board, responsible for consistent application of data protection rules by supervisory authorities within the EU, clarified there is no grace period permitted for ceasing to use Privacy Shield. "The transfer must be stopped immediately and alternatives must be examined as to how data processes can be changed over while [the data remains] in the EU," VDR has written to its members.

The same ECJ judgment also re-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 23

What's Inside

3 ON THE HORIZON Delta Applies for Anti-trust Immunity with Latam • AA & JetBlue Plan Partnership

8 MANAGEMENT GBTA's Solombrino Cleared, Departs Organization • Concur Survey: Travelers Expect Post-Pandemic Changes • Pretrip Approval Gains Prominence • Efforts to Address LGBTQ Traveler Needs

16 LODGING Hotel Chains Add Guest Mask Requirement • 2020 JD Power Hotel Survey Results

18 GLOBAL DHS Reverses New York Trusted Traveler Ban • Canada's GardaWorld Acquires WorldAware

19 PROCUREMENT Jurny Inks Expansion Deal

21 TRANSPORTATION IAG, Air France Grapple with Pandemic's Effects • Avis Budget Ponders Corp. Travel Opportunity

22 PAYMENT & TECHNOLOGY Amex Sees Full Force of Pandemic on Q2 Revenue • Emburse Adds Payment Piece to Chrome River

25 VOICES Fail This Test and Our Industry Dies

4 | On the Record

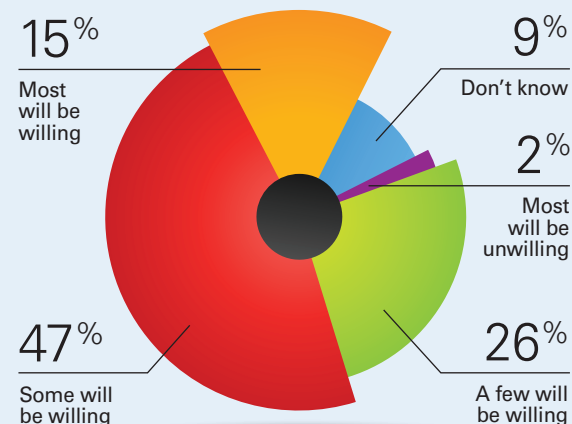


Routehappy founder & former CEO Robert Albert on passing the torch to those who will now take his vision forward.

"You know when you're a good corporate person and don't talk about what you believe in so much? That always bothered me."

5 | Data Hub

Employees' Willingness to Travel Six Months After Restrictions Are Lifted



SUBSCRIBE TODAY!

BTN
BUSINESS TRAVEL NEWS

For over 35 years, Business Travel News has been providing business travel and meeting professionals with news, analysis and research. In addition to monthly issues, BTN produces six annual research issues including the Business Travel Buyer's Handbook, Corporate Travel Index, Corporate Travel 100 and more.

Travel Procurement

Published quarterly, Travel Procurement is the leading information source for procurement and purchasing professionals who are responsible for setting travel policy, and managing and buying business travel/meetings on behalf of their company.

The Beat

The Beat is the must-read source for senior-level corporate travel professionals, providing breaking news, insightful views and compelling interviews on corporate travel distribution, travel management and technology.

BTN
BUSINESS TRAVEL NEWS
EUROPE

Business Travel News Europe, published six times annually, is the leading source of information, news, features, data and research for corporate travel managers and travel management professionals who are responsible for setting travel/meeting policy and purchase/manage business travel/meetings globally on behalf of their company.

www.businesstravelnews.com

BTNGROUP DID YOU GET THE NEWS?

Complimentary subscriptions to BTN Group Newsletters deliver the latest:

- Supplier developments
- Industry analysis
- Emerging practices
- Original research

*Delivered every other week / ** Delivered monthly / *** Delivered twice weekly

BTNDAILY

Essential as morning coffee, a quick update for your daily dose of industry news

BTNGLOBAL

Industry developments and case studies to inform your multinational travel program *

BTN TRAVEL MANAGEMENT

Hits your inbox with top supplier news and best practices *

Travel Procurement

Your fix of market analysis, supplier management and program measurement **

BTN EUROPE

Corporate travel news from across the pond ***



SUBSCRIBE NOW: www.businesstravelnews.com/newsletters



Delta Applies for Anti-trust-Immune JV with Latam, Plans Miami Hub

BY CHRIS DAVIS

Delta Air Lines and Latam Airlines Group last month filed with the U.S. Department of Transportation an application for antitrust immunity for their planned joint venture. If granted, the move would allow the carriers to jointly plan service and set fares on flights between some South American countries and the U.S. and Canada. The carriers also noted plans for Delta to boost its domestic and international presence in Miami.

Delta in September 2019 took a 20 percent stake in Latam, and in May announced plans for its joint venture.

“Among other benefits, the JV will offer Delta/LATAM customers access to world-class airline products, superior frequent flyer benefits, and shared airport facilities and amenities, for a more seamless travel experience,” according to the airlines’ filing with DOT. “The JV will also create a more effective Latin network competitor to American Airlines, United Airlines, and their Latin American carrier partners, generating procompetitive benefits in the form of new and enhanced service, more convenient connections, and superior product offerings that will flow directly to consumers.”

Latam last year had sought a joint venture with American Airlines, but that was blocked in May 2019 by Chile’s Supreme Court. The carrier subsequently separated from the AA deal

The carriers in the application also said Delta would “transform” Miami International Airport “into a new U.S.-South America gateway, in direct competition with American” and “a new domestic and international hub.”

and formed a partnership with Delta.

Delta and Latam in the DOT filing noted that a Latam-AA joint venture would have produced overlapping nonstop service on six routes, but such overlap would occur on one Delta-Latam route: New York-São Paulo.

“Transforming” Miami

The carriers in the application also said Delta would “transform” Miami International Airport “into a new U.S.-South America gateway, in direct competition with American” and “a new domestic and international hub.”

In the filing, the carriers said that “as demand recovers from the Covid-19 impact,” Delta would add more than 20 domestic flights from Miami, including to “top corporate travel destinations,” with their identities redacted.

Delta, which earlier this year announced increased service to Miami, said that with the JV fully implemented, it would offer nonstop service between Miami and 10 U.S. cities.

“This planned network expansion at Miami will enhance competition, leading to additional direct nonstop competition on five domestic routes and nine international routes,” according to the filing. “The expansion is also likely to trigger strong responses from competitors, which will further benefit air travelers on both domestic and international routes.

At the core of this growth at MIA will be an enhanced joint corporate sales contracting capability. Delta and LATAM together provide strong coverage of markets that matter most to corporate customers in Miami.”

The carriers would need approval not only from DOT but also relevant South American authorities to fully implement the joint venture.

Latam in May filed for Chapter 11 protection in U.S. bankruptcy court in order to maintain operations as it works to pay off creditors, which the carriers at the time said does not affect their joint-venture plans. ■

American Airlines and JetBlue Plan Partnership, Expanded Service

BY MICHAEL B. BAKER

American Airlines and JetBlue Airways are forming a partnership that will include codesharing and expanded service offerings out of New York, the carriers announced.

Pending government approval, the carriers will develop a codeshare network “pairing JetBlue’s domestic network with American’s international route map,” according to JetBlue president and COO Joanna Geraghty. It will include about 60 routes operated by American and more than 130 routes operated by JetBlue.

To build on the partnership, American plans to launch service between New York’s John F. Kennedy International Airport and Tel Aviv as well as seasonal summer service between JFK and Athens, the first long-haul flights the carrier has added from JFK in four years. American also will add seasonal winter service to Rio de Janeiro beginning in winter 2021.

JetBlue, meanwhile, plans to increase its network out of New York, with new service at JFK coordinated to connect with Ameri-

can’s international network. The carrier plans to build from the other two major New York area airports, including new transcontinental service from Newark that includes its premium Mint product.

The announcement did not include specific details on how the carriers’ respective loyalty programs would play into the agreement, which an American Airlines spokesperson said were still under discussion.

JetBlue and American have worked together before, having launched interlining and offering frequent flyer reciprocity on select routes about a decade ago. The carriers terminated those agreements in 2014.

The new partnership will be an East Coast counterpart to the West Coast alliance announced by American and Alaska Airlines earlier this year. Unlike Alaska, however, JetBlue said it had no intention of joining the Oneworld alliance. JetBlue also will not join the joint business agreement in place between American and International Airlines Group and still plans to launch its own transatlantic service to London next year. ■



Routehappy's Robert Albert Steps Down

About a decade after founding and leading flight shopping information hub Routehappy, Robert Albert has stepped down. Albert pioneered a vast database of details about flights and amenities, creating such terms as "Universal Ticket Attributes" to show perks and restrictions that come with a ticket and "Universal Product Attributes" for rich content such as photos, videos and descriptive text to give passengers a better idea of what they were buying across sales channels. Albert continued to lead Routehappy after its acquisition by ATPCO in early 2018—ATPCO's first acquisition in its more than 50-year history—and now holds solely an advisory role. Albert talked to BTN transportation editor Michael B. Baker about his decision.

WALK US THROUGH THE JOURNEY OF BUILDING ROUTEHAPPY INTO WHAT IS TODAY.

This was just an idea and something I believed the whole industry needed. The last 10 years has been an organic, evangelizing climb up Mount Everest. There have been moments of spreading a religion, where I felt like I was preaching to people all over the world. It was a bit chicken and egg: We had to say to every airline that if you do it, then the sales channels will do it, and to the sales channels that if you do it, the airlines will do it. We kept pushing on all fronts, and enough airlines and systems were adopting that kept strengthening and turning Routehappy into a real thing. When ATPCO acquired Routehappy two and a half years ago, it was a huge endorsement of what we were doing, but the work did not stop. It got exponential. The last two and a half years have been all about scaling and growing up and standardizing. I'm happy to say after a decade from founding, there is a comprehensive repository of airline rich content. UTAs are up to 94 percent of the global flight schedule, and UPAs and amenities are up to 99 percent. There's a mass of comprehensive content, which is what the industry needs, but in addition, our goal is to create a platform that can scale and be flexible no matter what happens.

HOW DOES THAT APPLY IN TODAY'S ENVIRONMENT?

Investors used to say, "What happens when there's a downturn?" I said that Routehappy will be as important if not more important then. When there's a downturn, airlines are going to need to fill their seats, and there's always stuff that happens—a volcano erupts in Hawaii somewhere—and there's always a message that needs to get out. The last three months, with



Former Routehappy CEO Robert Albert talks:

- Milestones over a decade at Routehappy's helm
- Routehappy's role amid the Covid-19 pandemic
- Why the travel industry needs to get louder about social justice

"You know when you're a good corporate person and don't talk about what you believe in so much? That always bothered me."

these Reassurance UPAs, three months from my departure of my full-time role, we were able to adapt UPAs and prove they can be used for urgent, time-sensitive messaging when the industry needs it. Two weeks after the real thing started, we had 75 percent of the global flight schedule covered with Reassurance UPAs, and airlines and systems and channels were incredibly grateful. We all felt good that we were able to do something, and I personally felt happy and gratified that this foundation we built continues to scale and be flexible.

WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO STEP DOWN NOW?

After an acquisition, the founder, the executive team and old team needs to take some moments to reflect. What does everyone individually want, and what's the path? We all went into it open to that, and I'm proud to say 90 percent of the team is thriving. About six to 12 months after the acquisition, I had a sit down with [ATPCO president and CEO Rolf Purzner], and we talked about the path ahead. I had come to the conclusion that I'd be ready to take a break after a decade of climbing Mount Everest for the obvious reasons of working hard. I'm super passionate about the industry and the problem we're trying to solve, but I knew we could get this to the point where the vision carrier wasn't needed in the picture anymore in the same way. Now, all these other people are owning this, innovating it and integrating it, so this was the right time for me to take a break and recharge. The team is good, and ATPCO has embraced this, so it's an opportunity for me to take a break, recharge and know everything will keep going on.

SO, WHAT'S NEXT FOR YOU?

I will remain a senior advisor as of July 1. I want to say connected, but I have a list of 10-15 things I've had to put on hold that I'm passionate about, so I've decided to go pursue those in addition to staying connected. I have this strong desire to spend more time in nature, hike and learn about nature and help do some things for our environment.

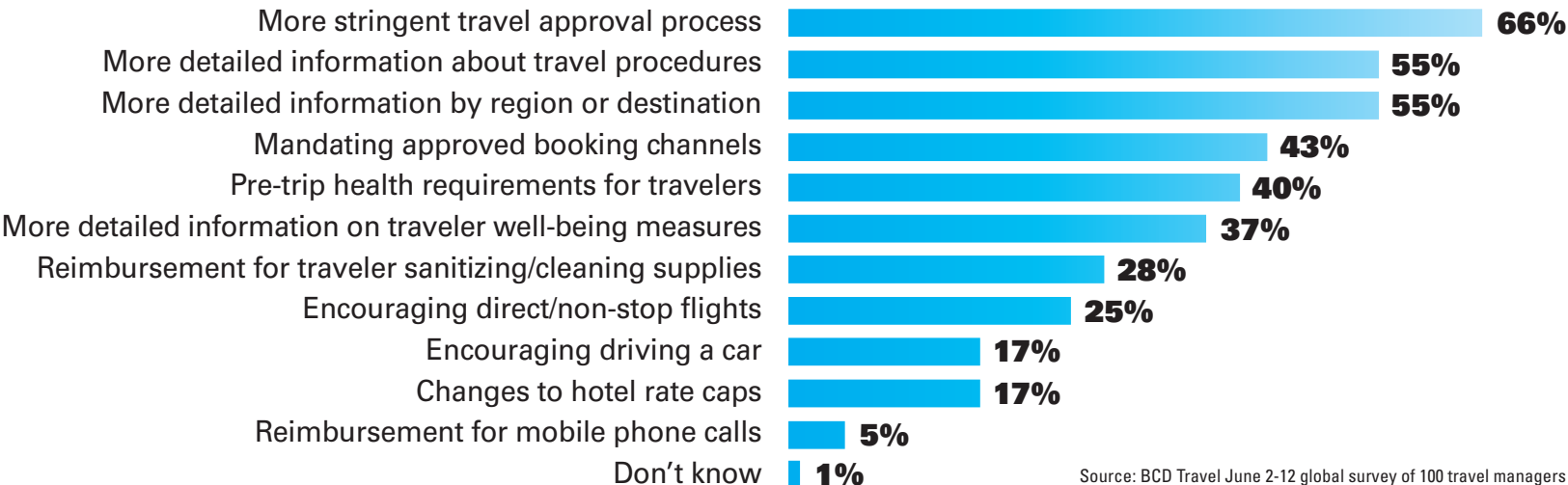
[Another] is social justice causes. There are all these causes I'm really passionate about, but I was too busy. You know when you're a good corporate person and don't talk about what you believe in so much? That always bothered me. Now I have this opportunity to be totally authentic about what I care about.

In the world, we have problems, and I want to take the skills I've learned at Routehappy in helping to influence an industry and create something for the common good and apply that to a common universe. It's both social justice and politics. I've started to volunteer for a group for people facing economic anxieties because of what's going on with Covid, and I have some things I'm starting on the political front. Once I get my sea legs in this, I hope to get back to everyone I've known and worked with and help people understand how they can get involved. ■

Assessing a Post-Pandemic Travel Climate

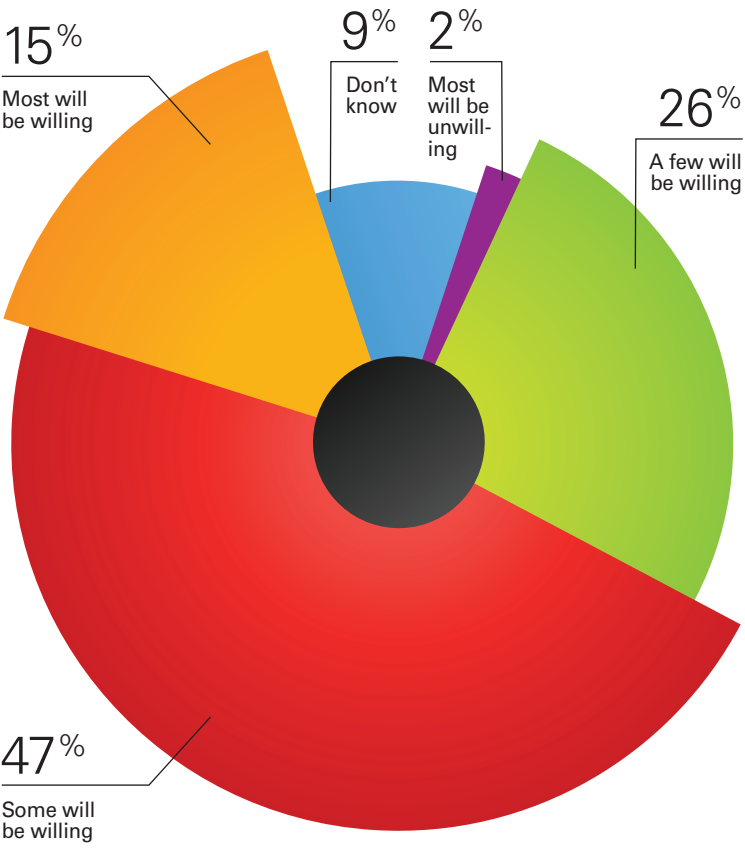
Any widespread business travel recovery, particularly in the United States, seems remote thanks to the continued spread of Covid-19 cases, but travel managers and travelers alike are considering how a “business travel new normal” might look, in terms of policy, pre- and in-trip procedures and traveler comfort. Still, U.S. travel agency data show there’s not yet much demand to get back on the road.

EXPECTED CHANGES TO TRAVEL POLICY DUE TO COVID-19



Source: BCD Travel June 2-12 global survey of 100 travel managers

EMPLOYEES' WILLINGNESS TO TRAVEL SIX MONTHS AFTER RESTRICTIONS ARE LIFTED



Source: Global Business Travel Association July 7-13 online global survey of 704 member travel buyers and procurement professionals

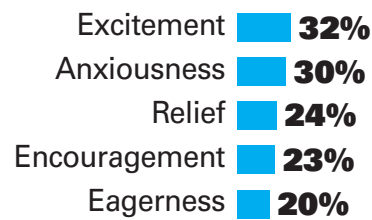
37%

TRAVEL MANAGERS WHO EXPECT THEIR ORGANIZATIONS TO LIMIT BUSINESS TRAVEL ON A LONG-TERM BASIS TO ONLY THE MOST CRITICAL TRIPS.

Source: Wakefield Research/Concur May 20-June 9 survey of 800 travel managers in eight global markets

BUSINESS TRAVELERS GREET THE PROSPECT OF RESUMING TRAVEL WITH MIXED EMOTIONS

Emotions cited by travelers about returning to travel



Source: Wakefield Research/Concur May 20-June 9 worldwide survey of 4,850 business travelers

ARC: LITTLE RECOVERY IN AIR TICKETS SOLD BY U.S. AGENCIES

7-Day Period Ending	Agency type, YOY change		
	Corporate	Online	Leisure/Other
July 12	-90.4%	-74.0%	-80.6%
July 19	-90.0%	-73.7%	-81.1%
July 26	-89.2%	-70.5%	-80.2%
August 2	-89.7%	-70.8%	-80.5%
Year to Date	-61.86%	-53.05%	-57.01%

Source: ARC

Business Travel Show

A M E R I C A 

A V I R T U A L E X P O

SEPTEMBER 9-10, 2020

The Inaugural Business Travel Show America, a Virtual Expo, brings the industry together to realign the future of corporate travel and meetings. Combining premium education and networking in a virtual environment, attendees will experience the hallmark content they trust and expect from the BTN Group, including specialized sessions for all levels of travel/meetings program maturity, CEO and executive presentations and a virtual expo floor to network with suppliers.

Join over 1,000 of your peers for the industry's largest virtual gathering and make those critical connections that will move you and your business forward.

PRESENTED BY

BTNGROUP
CONFERENCES & EVENTS

PUBLISHERS OF

BTN
BUSINESS TRAVEL NEWS

Travel Procurement

The Beat

BTN
BUSINESS TRAVEL NEWS
EUROPE

EXHIBITORS

AS OF 8/11



ACCOR



REGISTER NOW!

www.BusinessTravelShowAmerica.com



GBTA's Solombrino Cleared, Departs Organization

BY ELIZABETH WEST

Global Business Travel Association CEO Scott Solombrino, under investigation for workplace misconduct and on administrative leave since June 19, last month was cleared by the organization of the allegations and left his position.

"No misconduct or legal wrongdoing by Mr. Solombrino was found regarding these allegations," the board of directors said in a press statement. Still, the association and Solombrino mutually agreed that it was time for him to seek other opportunities, according to the statement, which did not detail a financial exit package or whether such a package exists.

Interim executive director Dave Hilfman, whom GBTA hired during the course of the leadership crisis, thanked Solombrino for his service. "We thank Scott for his 25 years of service to GBTA and his passion and commitment to advancing the travel industry. We wish Scott success in his future endeavors."

The uproar was triggered by an anonymous email signed "current & former GBTA Staff" alleging misconduct by Solombrino and which circulated among industry insiders in June. Sent to BTN June 12, the letter claimed, among other misdeeds, that Solombrino created a hostile working environment for women and racial minorities, and cited "racist, divisive and derogatory comments" against those groups as well as past employees. It also alleged negligence of EVP Lisa Censullo and among board members for allowing Solombrino to go unchecked.

GBTA used Polsinelli—a New York-based law firm that has long represented the association—to conduct the investigation. Some, including current employees, felt the close ties would compromise objectivity.



"We've retained [MCI USA] to look at every aspect of what we do, from the role of the board to operations, staffing and human resources, IT, event management and marketing."

—GBTA'S DAVE HILFMAN

As the investigation wore on, major sponsors and historic partners publicly disavowed the organization and volunteer committees suspended activity. Internally, eight members of GBTA's senior leadership team, each with titles VP and above, sent a June 20 letter to the board of directors corroborating the anonymous allegations that kicked off the investigation and citing "additional incidents" not detailed in the allegations but that would be relevant to the investigation.

"It needs to be known that the leadership team corroborated the allegations," said a source close to the issue, who asked not to be identified for fear of retaliation.

The individual added, however, that many in the organization are simply looking to turn the page on this chapter.

To that end, GBTA last month began an engagement with third party association management company MCI USA to assess the association's organizational structure and operations.

"We've retained them to look at every aspect of what we do, from the role of the board to operations, staffing and human resources, IT, event management and marketing," said Hilfman in a press statement. ■

Concur Survey: Travelers Expect Major Post-Pandemic Changes

BY ADAM PERROTTA

Business travelers largely feel positive about eventually getting out on the road again in the wake of the Covid-19 crisis, but the vast majority expect travel to look and feel very different than it did before the pandemic, a new study from SAP Concur found.

Conducted between May 20 and June 9, 2020, in partnership with Wakefield Research, Concur's survey canvassed 4,850 business travelers and 800 travel managers in a total of 23 markets across the globe, seeking insight into respondents' attitudes, concerns and priorities regarding the resumption of business travel.

Travelers generally had mixed feelings about the return of travel, with 39 percent reporting at least some worry about their next business trip. However, 59 percent identified at least one positive emotion associated with the prospect, with 32 percent even saying they were excited to hit the road again. Among

other emotions cited by respondents were anxiousness (30 percent), relief (24 percent), encouragement (23 percent) and eagerness (20 percent).

Regardless of sentiment about the return of corporate travel, the overwhelming majority of respondents expected a "new normal" to prevail, even after official Covid-related restrictions and policies are lifted. Among travelers polled, 97 percent expected new hygiene and safety behaviors to persist for the long term. About 54 percent said they would wear face masks during travel, while 52 percent anticipated access to hand sanitizers becoming standard. Meanwhile, 47 percent expected social distancing to become the norm and 41 percent anticipated routine temperature screenings.

Hygiene concerns also could affect travelers' booking decisions, the study found, with 29 percent of travelers prioritizing the shortest route to a desti-

nation when deciding on a flight. That sentiment among travelers could force companies to rethink the concept of lowest logical fares in the context of their travel policy to allow for more direct flights over lower cost multi-legged itineraries, Concur said.

Along with travelers, corporate travel managers also expect major post-Covid changes, the survey found. Among managers polled, 98 percent expected both short-term and long-term changes to their corporate travel policies. Managers' most widely expected new measures include mandatory personal health screenings for travelers (44 percent), mandatory travel safety trainings (43 percent) and pre-trip approval (40 percent). Managers also anticipated giving travelers more leeway in rebooking or changing travel plans quickly (38 percent) and limiting business travel to only the most critical trips (37 percent), the study found. ■

Pre-Trip Approval Gains Prominence Amid Pandemic

BY JAY BOEHMER

Since the onslaught of Covid-19, companies have exerted more control over employee travel: who can, under what circumstances, where they can go, or if they're allowed to at all. Travel freezes, aside from trips deemed "essential," have become common. So, too, has a tighter embrace of pre-trip approval processes and policies. If not ubiquitous, pre-trip approval is a new normal in managed travel.

"The vast majority of clients I've spoken to have strengthened their pre-trip approval process because they recognize there's a lot more complexity to work through and make sure not only the travel is permitted but that the traveler has all the right information to ensure they're safe through the journey," American Express Global Business Travel CEO Paul Abbott said during a late June interview.

Commentary from other travel management companies as well as travel buyers bear this out. So do recent surveys.

A Global Business Travel Association July survey of 2,167 worldwide member companies found that 53 percent of travel buyer and procurement professional respondents (who comprised 43 percent of all respondents) had instituted "new rules about pre-trip approval" as a result of the pandemic.

A BCD Travel poll, meanwhile, of 100 clients fielded in June included a list of prospective measures clients adopted for employee travel in the Covid-19 era. Pre-trip approval was the top-rated measure, as three-quarters of BCD's respondents implemented additional such approvals amid the pandemic.

AstraZeneca is one such client. In March, the pharmaceutical company swiftly adopted new pre-trip processes, requiring all international travel be "essential" and secure "senior executive team approval," said global category lead Kerrie Henshaw-Cox during a BCD Travel webinar last month.

AstraZeneca's policies are evolving as the pandemic evolves. "To start with, we did the same for domestic travel—we kept it high-level," she said. "We've now reduced that slightly, and the approval process is at a country level—so, at a domestic level, the approval is for the highest person in that country."

She added: "In a country like Vietnam, they're getting blanket approvals, so it now reverts back to your normal line manager: Are you able to travel? In the U.S., across state travel, we're still doing site-lead approval. It's really high-level."

Long part of the travel management toolkit, pre-trip management takes various forms. Some automated processes are extended through booking tools, third-party tech providers or TMCs to route notifications after booking but before ticketing. Sometimes approval is passive, meaning the trip proceeds unless a manager intervenes. In other deployments, the booking won't go to ticketing before sign-off. In some instances, travelers must get approval before even initiating a booking. Some pre-trip approvals are implemented only for certain destinations. Others blanket all travel.

Amid the pandemic, some travel management professionals said new policies trigger trip authorization requirements earlier in the travel process, before booking instead of before traveling. In some cases, pre-trip approval requirements themselves are escalating within organizations, from direct managers all the way to the upper reaches.

"It's all over the board," Travel and Transport executive director of account management Jami Hedrick said in an interview addressing the many shapes of pre-trip policy. She's witnessed several companies turn pre-trip into pre-booking approval, having travelers "get that approval before they ever make the booking."



"There was a point where pre-trip approvals were kind of rubber stamps. I think they're going to start having a little more meaning post-Covid."

—TRAVEL TECH CONSULTING'S
NORM ROSE

These companies may be managing the approval process before a traveler even contacts the TMC.

"We really anticipated that a lot of customers would be coming to us and wanting us to put pre-trip approval processes in place," Hedrick said. "But, by and large, most customers have said, 'We're going to manage that on our end.'"

Other corporate clients, she said, have afforded greater traveler discretion: "As long as you feel comfortable traveling, talk it over with your manager, but we're not going to restrict travel in any way."

Hedrick continued: "We have some customers that have said, 'You have to have approval from this level or above.' They'll provide us a list of who those people are. Some have asked that the advisor just document the record on who they obtained approval from. Other companies have a formal form—like a web-based form. Once they complete the form, they send that over to us, and we can't ticket until we get the form. Others just use our automated approval that says you're allowed to book, but we won't ticket it until someone approves the reservation through the automated approval process itself."

Regardless of the nature of processes and policy, pre-trip is likely to grow sharper teeth. "There was a point where pre-trip approvals were kind of rubber stamps," Travel Tech Consulting president Norm Rose said in June during a Phocuswire webinar. "I think they're going to start having a little more meaning post-Covid."

Even so, pre-trip approval is not unanimously adopted.

Takeda head of global travel Michelle De Costa said only "essential travel" has been taking place at the pharmaceutical company, but pre-trip has not been institutionalized. She embraced a "trusting-the-traveler" ethos, expecting them to have one-to-one conversations with their managers to deem whether travel is essential, she said in June during a BTN Group webinar.

EAB vice president of business solutions Steven Mandelbaum during that webinar said the education research and consulting firm wasn't planning on adding a pre-trip approval process, much like it hadn't pre-Covid. "Travel is largely domestic," he said. "Whenever we decide to travel, we will probably open it up without the pre-trip approval." ■

The Beat



Companies Broadening Efforts to Address LGBTQ Traveler Needs

BY MICHAEL B. BAKER

With Pride Month now more than a month in the past, rainbow logos and solidarity statements have been put in storage for another year, but many companies are realizing that recognizing and addressing the need for LGBTQ employees—including within a travel program—is a year-round process.

“You’re trying to create sensitivity and understanding across all of your stakeholders, and it can’t be done in one memo, one communication and one month, like Pride,” GeoSure co-founder and CEO Michael Becker said in a recent BTN webinar. “It has to be done continuously, and we’re beginning to see seismic shifts throughout organizations for diversity, inclusion and equality.”

Safety and security remains the driver of many of these efforts, as LGBTQ persecution remains the law in many countries today. Human rights legal advocacy group Human Dignity Trust reports 73 jurisdictions around the world have laws criminalizing same-sex activity. Twelve of those jurisdictions have the death penalty as a potential sentence for such activity, and six of those actively implement that penalty.

Addressing LGBTQ traveler needs goes beyond those extremes, however. Within the United States, several states have introduced “bathroom laws” that target transgender individuals’ right to use public facilities, and it was only this summer that the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed that employees could not be fired on the basis of sexual orientation.

But the LGBTQ business travel experience goes beyond legal issues, in ways that might be invisible to buyers. Maiden Voyage CEO and cofounder Carolyn Pearson, who conducts training to help travel programs support LGBTQ travelers and other groups, said she spoke with one traveler who, during breakfast at a hotel with his husband, heard a staff member mutter under his breath that his parents should be ashamed of him. Another traveler, a transgender woman, was misgendered as “sir” by a front desk employee at an upscale New York hotel despite the employee knowing her gender, she said.

“It’s some highly offensive behavior, but you ask travelers, and very rarely do they complain,” Pearson said. “They might just vote with their feet and choose to spend their money elsewhere.”

Of course, travel programs have a line to tread between safety and privacy. While LGBTQ travelers should be informed of situations where they face dangers not experienced by non-LGBTQ travelers, companies likely would not want to deny them internal opportunities that might require such travel. Additionally, companies shouldn’t put travelers in a position of potentially having to out themselves at work.

Reaching out to LGBTQ travelers for their input should be a first step, said Booking.com security program manager Amir Naveh, who recently left a similar position at Facebook.

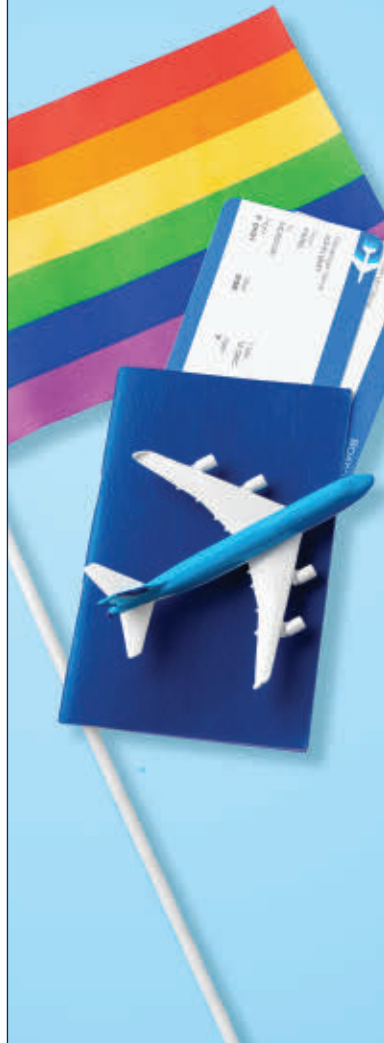
“A lot of companies put branding together but don’t couple it with action, which can look artificial,” he said. “You don’t want to make decisions without asking people what they want, so make partnerships with internal communities in research groups.”

Making sure LGBTQ travelers are involved in program development not only ensures their needs are understood but also provides an opportunity to give a personal touch by using the stories and voices of those willing to participate in any initiatives, Naveh said.

A growing number of data sources can help buyers address LGBTQ traveler needs. GeoSure, for example, about two years ago developed LGBTQ safety ratings for more than 30,000 neighborhoods globally, which measure the likelihood that LGBTQ travelers will face discrimination in that area. Some corporate travel programs are providing those ratings to travelers across the travel ecosystem through dashboards or

“People don’t want to cause offense and say the wrong thing, but the worst thing they can do is absolutely nothing.”

—MAIDEN VOYAGE’S
CAROLYN PEARSON



such apps as TripIt, which can display a neighborhood rating within an itinerary. More recently, Travel and Transport added data relating to local laws and other dangers as an overlay option for the safety and security map in its Swift Data reporting product.

Getting that information available to travelers is a way of “democratizing safety, understanding that certain organizations might have different demographics in terms of stakeholders,” Becker said. “These tools are for everyone in the organization.”

That information also has value to non-LGBTQ employees, not only as a point of awareness but also in ways they might need to consider their own behaviors while traveling. For example, an unaware traveler could unwittingly out colleagues by making innocuous conversation about their families in situations where LGBTQ employees might not feel safe in coming out.

Travel management companies also are taking bigger roles in identifying risks, American Express Global Business Travel chief information technology officer David Thomson said. Those efforts include providing the data as well as “training traveler counselors to listen to the needs of travelers and the corporation,” he said. “They might listen to comments from an employee unwilling to travel to a location because of new restrictions and can facilitate that conversation with the employee and the corporation.”

Suppliers more frequently are volunteering information regarding the LGBTQ community in requests for proposals as well, such as their scores in the Human Rights Campaign Corporate Equality Index, Thomson said.

Even with more resources, an environment in which LGBTQ travelers feel they are a part of the conversation and free to communicate is the essential first step. Managers should also expect to make a few mistakes.

“Don’t expect it to be perfect,” Naveh said. “[Employees] will want to see that you’re making progress and are including people in it, but if communities know you are looking out for them, they will share information. Communities will reach out with ideas to keep you ahead of the curve.”

Travel buyers can get friendly with their company’s pride and diversity networks and attend events, for example, Pearson said.

“If you want to be an ally, every day is a school day,” Pearson said. “People don’t want to cause offense and say the wrong thing, but the worst thing they can do is absolutely nothing.” ■



BTN'S 2020

MEETINGS MANAGEMENT REPORT

INSIDE...

**New Costs for
Hybrid Events**

**How Video
Games Will
School Virtual
Events**

**When
Will In-Person
Meetings Resume?**

New Design & Cost Considerations for Meetings

By Donna M. Airoidi

Virtual events rule the meetings world at the moment, but that will change as face-to-face gatherings return—likely in a hybrid capacity for some time to start. When they do, meetings managers and planners need to consider new design elements and costs as they're putting their budgets together.

One trend meeting experts see is the shift in spend from food and beverage into technology. Though virtual meetings are less expensive than in-person ones, hybrid meetings will have costs for both elements, and those can become hefty the more complex the meeting.

"For some organizations, there was the naïve belief there would be no cost to this. You could just do a Webex, a Zoom, or whatever," said global VP of American Express Meetings & Events Linda McNairy. "But when you're really looking at driving that event experience, delivering enhanced content, there's a production element and costs associated with that that folks don't know about or have the experience to predict. I've had a lot of conversations with customers to supply the right technology and how to budget appropriately for that."

A senior manager with a pharmaceutical company held a hybrid meeting for the company's national sales team earlier this year using the Pando platform, which she said can get expensive, but it provided the intensive interactivity needed among the headquarters office and multiple field locations. She also had three to five simultaneous groups of 20 to 40 people gathered at eight hotels across different time zones in the U.S. One of the considerations was whether the hotels could handle the tech work that needed to be done.

BTN'S 2020 MEETINGS MANAGEMENT REPORT

"We went back and forth a lot and ended up having the Pando team hire their technicians to be onsite at the hotels, plus they would work with the hotel's A/V," she said, adding that they made this decision to reduce the stress hotel managers had about not having worked with the technology before. "There were a lot of tech discussions that had to happen. I don't know if that level of high-touch, high-cost investment is always necessary, but because these were big meetings, we had to get it right. We had the hotel rooms for only so many hours, so we felt it was worth the investment for extra insurance."

That's another consideration: Are hotels and other venues ready for hybrid meetings? "In many cases, no they are not able to support this technology," said DigitTravel VP of consulting Shimon Avish. "What they've supported up to now through their subcontractors has been pretty straightforward: the bandwidth you need and A/V equipment. But hotels are not equipped or trained to do some of these more sophisticated hybrid, virtual event platforms."

As a result, many of the production houses have been pivoting quickly to virtual events and becoming primary suppliers in that area, he said.

Creative Design

Another trend revolves around design. With physical distancing requirements and the need to make attendees feel safe, event owners and suppliers have had to get creative with their solutions for future in-person events. Physical-distancing set-ups are standard now, and there is the increased use of outdoor settings, as well as open public spaces.

"If a lobby is not being used, it can be set up as a classroom, with atrium areas for overflow," said director of event services for Pittsburgh's David L. Lawrence Convention Center Jamie Huckleberry. "Or split [attendees'] time between the exhibit hall and breakouts. Have half at the exhibit hall, then switch. On the exhibit hall, if there are fewer booths, you can build a satellite workshop there and use the tech and A/V providers to stream [the content]. If [a participant] can't attend a workshop in the morning, they can still watch it. That also helps with the traffic flow."

The same can be done for general sessions, with half attending while the other half is on the trade floor, then rotating, said Arlington Convention and Visitors Bureau destination services manager Paola Bowman, who is working with MPI on its November congress taking place in nearby Grapevine, Texas. "That means the speaker might have to speak twice, but [the attendees] will receive the same message from the same speaker while not crowding in place."

McNairy said some planners are separating attendees into groups where half will eat together in a dining space on one night and the other half will eat in their guestrooms, and then they'll switch places the next night. Or half will eat at noon and the other half at 1 p.m., said Bowman.

Bowman also noted some groups are assigning lanyards or bracelets that are color coded to identify different levels of interactive comfort for attendees. "Some people are not comfortable with networking, they'll listen to the content then go back to their room," she said. "Others are OK with an elbow bump or just waving to each other." The color-coded items would let people

know whether that elbow bump is welcome, or if they should steer clear.

McNairy said she also is hearing customers being more open to introducing "mindfulness moments" into their meetings. "There's more stress in this environment, and it's incorporating time and space for people to re-center their thoughts," she said. "It's not just for face-to-face. It's being encouraged and incorporated into virtual events."

Additional Costs

Some of these solutions come with increased price tags. Both Bowman and McNairy noted that ground transportation is "tougher to manage" given its somewhat fixed costs around each vehicle and the need to distance on a bus or minibus.

"For some... there was the naïve belief there would be no cost to this. You could just do a Webex, a Zoom, or whatever."

— LINDA MCNAIRY, GLOBAL VP OF AMERICAN EXPRESS MEETINGS & EVENTS

Labor also is a cost likely to go up for in-person meetings and events, not just for technology support, but also because more people will be needed for F&B services and additional cleanings. Both suppliers and industry organizations have introduced new cleanliness and safety standards and meetings protocols, including all the major hotel companies, the American Hotel & Lodging Association, the Event Service Professionals Association, and a taskforce of corporate travel buyers, suppliers and consultants who created the Travel and Meetings Standards report. Most if not all of these initiatives call for additional cleanings, hand sanitizer stations throughout hotels and meeting venues, barriers for buffet stations, additional staff at each station to serve individuals, coffee servers, and more.

"Additional hands for F&B are where you will see more labor needed," said Huckleberry, who is an ESPA member and worked on its recovery roadmap, along with Arlington's Bowman, who headed up the project. "I know hotels that were [saying] normal plated meals will have to have one server to serve the meal and one who is just taking away used silverware or glassware or plates to set the next meal so there is no cross-contamination possibility." For buffets, there also is the need for runners to take food to and from the stations, she added.

"One thing that worries me is that because so much more labor is needed to accomplish these events, there might be an impact on pricing," Avish said, adding that employees will have to verify their health every day. "That's also an added cost. There are new costs in the training of staff. There are added costs everywhere. Someone is going to have to cover those, or it will eat into profitability to such an extent that the business won't be profitable."

Who Pays?

Avish said that among his contacts the issue of who is going to pay has not yet been resolved, but he concedes the new steps are necessary to give meeting participants the confidence to return to meetings. "In the end, it will be a function of negotiation, a function of relationships, and it simply is not going to be one-size-fits-all," he said.

McNairy is finding that regarding budgets, there's a high level of commitment to do what is best for all parties involved. "Suppliers want the business, so how can we work together to emerge stronger on the other end," she said. "We're looking at hotels and venues that want to stimulate business. The biggest thing we're hearing is a balance for the suppliers, but also have owners and stakeholders be responsible for balancing that out as we return to meetings."

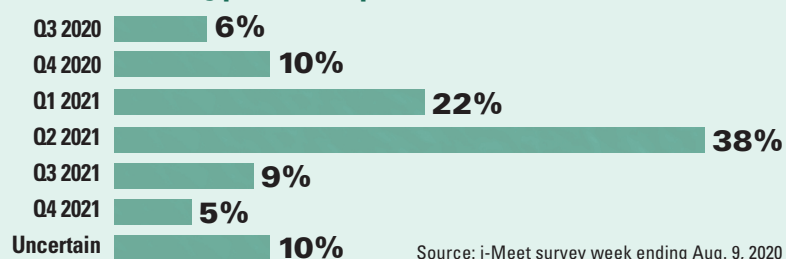
Bowman said it goes back to everyone being flexible, and "we are all in this together. Venues are not trying to outprice a meal because we have to add staff and double your costs," she said, though she admitted that some true increases in costs might be based on labor. "But there are times you can adjust, such as sharing a menu." If two back-to-back groups use the same menu, the venue can order for both versus one. "Labor is up, but food is down. It's having an honest and candid conversation with planners and have them let us know what their wish list is, what are the needs and objectives of the meeting, and where can we cut down in cost to even the field."

I-Meet: Most Meetings to Resume Q2 2021 or Later

The most recent i-Meet weekly survey of meeting planner sentiment ended Aug. 9. According to the survey, 74 percent of 352 respondents don't expect to resume operating face-to-face meetings until sometime in 2021. That compares with just 8 percent who predicted such a lengthy delay when the survey was first conducted in April.

Looking at the 2021 breakdown, 38 percent of respondents expect events to restart during the second quarter; 22 percent reported the first quarter. Ten percent remain uncertain. By type of meeting, 75 percent expect to operate hybrid meetings initially; 68 percent expect to plan small (25 or fewer attendees), drive-to events. On the bright side, 77 percent of respondents have events booked and contracted for 2021; but that means nearly one in four do not.

When do meeting planners expect to resume face-to-face events?



Both Avish and McNairy said it's too soon to tell who will cover the costs as there isn't a lot of group business on the books at the moment, and 2021 budgets are still being set. One contact for Avish booked an event for the first quarter, but he's not confident it will happen. "The only kinds of events going forward are bubble events, where they buy-out an entire wing of a hotel, or buyout the entire hotel" he said.

Enticing Meetings to Return in 2021

For their part, some hotels and hotel companies are doing what they can to entice meetings to return—with deals. Langham Hotels in the United States

has relaunched its "No Strings Attached" pledge for meetings booked through Dec. 31, 2020, and taking place by March 31, 2021. Hilton Worldwide has an offer for meetings booked through Dec. 31 and taking place by May 31, 2021 that features flexible cancellation without penalty up to eight days in advance of arrival with its Hilton Express Meeting Agreement—now available for meetings and events with a budget of up to \$50,000. Previously, \$25,000 was the cap. Individual hotels are floating offers as well. Meeting managers will want to stay on top of these offers as they will show where properties are willing to negotiate. Generous technology inclusions and friendly cancellation and attrition terms should be table stakes for in-person venue options going into 2021. ■

What Virtual Meetings Must Learn from Video Games

BY DAWIT HABTEMARIAM

Amid the Covid-19 pandemic, meeting planners canceled or rescheduled their meetings and events, but from April 23rd to 25th, hip-hop artist Travis Scott performed five concerts to a total of over 27 million people around the world. The event was hosted virtually on the online gaming platform Fortnite. Scott performed from his home while attendees danced in the concert as avatars.

While a large part of the concert's success can be attributed to the performer's fame, another factor could be the video game experience itself. If virtual meetings want to engage the next generation of workers—those born after 1996, also called Gen Z or Zoomers—tech providers will have to up their game and meeting owners and planners will need to take more technological risks.

According to DigiTravel Consulting VP Shimon Avish, corporates have been slow to adopt virtual meetings. One reason, said Bizly chief strategy officer Kevin Iwamoto, is because new tech can introduce executional errors. "You're expected to perform at 100 percent every time you organize a meeting. Your boss wants everything to go as perfect as possible, so the expectation level is like being a pilot," Iwamoto said. "Any major screwup reflects badly on the company."

Covid-19 has given meeting organizers one choice: convert to virtual or cancel. When they did it, though, many were surprised to see their events attracted a greater number of attendees. The challenge was how to engage them.

"How do you get mass participation and interaction in an environment that people are not together in a room and there is no crowd energy?" Iwamoto said. Many corporates have been making the mistake of replicating what they were doing in-person to their virtual conferences.

"You go on to a webinar or internal team meeting and you get distracted by the technology," said Avish. If virtual meetings are going to thrive—and deliver real dividends to both hosts and participants—they have to create online magic, community and excitement.

THE KIDS ARE ALL RIGHT

The Center for Generational Kinetics published a report last year titled "State of Gen Z." It analyzed a survey of 2,000 U.S. respondents, 50 percent of whom were born after 1996. According to the report, 61 percent of Gen Z reported gaming at least once a week and for younger members of Gen Z

(ages 13-17), that number was higher at 70 percent. About 79 percent of Gen Z gamers said their favorite thing about gaming was that "it's fun."

Drill down a little further, and nearly half of that cohort said their favorite aspect was the time they spend with their friends. That's also what meetings are meant to do—bring groups of people together who are likeminded or who want to exchange ideas about a shared interest. Gen Z—digital natives born after the internet—have been using virtual platforms to maintain relationships and do just that. "Millennials and Gen Z figured out how to develop communities and live in a virtual world," said Iwamoto.

Online gaming platforms have cracked the code at maintaining large-scale participation and engagement. Some would say they're really good at getting people addicted. It should be hard for virtual meeting buyers and suppliers not to learn from it, according to meetings technology consultant Corbin Ball. "A major video game has out-shadowed a major blockbuster film by dozens or even thousands of times more. They are just huge moneymakers," he said, adding e-sports to that category as well.

Yet, virtual meetings platforms sometimes introduce friction, said Ball. "How does an exhibitor meet with an attendee and really conduct business?" Ball asked, adding that users will have different comfort levels with digital participation. Virtual platforms, he said, need to make it easier for the average person to use and navigate. He pointed to Second Life, which he used more than a decade ago for virtual speaking engagements, as just one example that never delivered that intuitive experience.

There are already some engagement strategies incorporated from online games. "Event technology has borrowed from gaming to achieve [engagement] for more than a decade, starting with gamification built into event mobile apps to bring mobile devices into the experience instead of competing with them," said Cvent cofounder and CTO Dave Quattrone, who said future events will go to hybrid in-person and virtual platforms.

Gen Z might argue that a few mobile features won't be enough to keep their excitement alive. Video games hook them in with behavioral tools like thrilling plotlines that require players to push forward by accomplishing tasks, point systems, multi-player competition or immersive experienc-

es. They also use controllers, headsets and mobile phones that players use to interact with the games they play and with other players. Game designers are integrating virtual reality headsets to get users into the world and the action of the game.

All this keeps people glued to the gaming activity. Meeting tech providers and event organizers will need to chase these kinds of demands if they want to command engagement now—and definitely in the future.

INVESTMENT ON THE RISE

Intrado Media president Ben Chodor agrees that immersive gaming features are the future of virtual meeting platform technology—and their appeal goes beyond the clients and participants one might imagine as usual suspects, like technology companies and young employees.

"We found that gaming elements of events have been one of the most popular. When people are in an environment, they want to have elements of gamification, whether it's getting on a leaderboard winning a prize or whether it's the interactivity."

With exponential demand for virtual and hybrid meetings, companies like Intrado are scaling up and doubling down with video gaming-style engagement features, not just a few apps that get participants to use their mouse and keyboard. Intrado is investing money and hiring game developers to help the

"As we go through the third and fourth quarter of 2021, some of the technology we're going to see is going to blow everyone away."

— INTRADO'S BEN CHODOR

company level up when it comes to immersive experiences. The company is looking to launch a next-generation version of the virtual meeting product that incorporates more virtual reality and gives meeting organizers approachable but sophisticated tools to capture the imagination of their audiences.

"As we go through the third and fourth quarter of 2021, some of the technology we're going to see is going to blow everyone away and for the first time a virtual event is going to rival a physical event."

But organizers will have to upskill as well, according to Chodor, no matter how intuitive the tools are. A year from now, he said, companies hiring meeting organizers will be asking about their virtual planning experience and to prove their creativity in engaging attendees in an online environment.

"The 'ooh-aah' moment doesn't last for three days," he said, adding that it's critical for organizers to keep those moments coming. "If I go to a session that is not compelling and can't interact with anyone because it's 2D or 1D ... then I'm one click away from never coming back." ■



VIRTUAL AND HYBRID MEETINGS: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

After face-to-face meetings ground to a halt because of the coronavirus pandemic, many companies pivoted to virtual events. According to a weekly meeting planner survey conducted by i-Meet, as of August 9, 74 percent of respondents indicated in-person meetings would not resume until 2021. Further, the vast majority said some or all of their future live meetings would include a virtual component. BTN editorial director Elizabeth West in late June moderated a webinar on these meeting types with Bondurant Consulting president Betsy Bondurant, Anthem director of travel and events Cindy Heston, American Express Meetings & Events VP global operations and shared services Linda McNairy, and Takeda Pharmaceuticals head of global meetings and events strategy and solutions Rawya Tullgren as panelists.

HYBRID AND VIRTUAL MEETINGS ARE NOT NEW. WHY HADN'T THEY BEEN FULLY EMBRACED BEFORE?

BETSY BONDURANT: I have painful memories of doing clunky satellite feeds into nine ballrooms for a product launch about a month after 9/11. Now we have wonderful technologies out there. As an industry, we [previously] didn't embrace anything other than face-to-face. But the last couple of months we've had to do virtual or nothing, so virtual has really come into its own. And we're finding it's a great way to amplify attendance. Event marketers are finding that their events are attracting two to three times [the audience] they had anticipated. Some of the benchmarking I've been doing with many different companies has [shown] that without a doubt, hybrid meetings will be here to stay.

LINDA, REGARDING THE I-MEET DATA, DOES IT MATCH WHAT YOU ARE SEEING AMONG GROUPS?

LINDA MCNAIRY: We've been following the i-Meet survey since it first launched, and it really has tracked fairly closely with what we've heard from customers. As the magnitude of the pandemic has been fully felt, the meetings are pushing out further.

WHAT ARE YOUR CLIENTS' KEY CONSIDERATIONS AS THEY START TO MOVE TOWARD VIRTUAL OR HYBRID

EVENTS THAT CAN DRIVE THEIR STRATEGIES?

MCNAIRY: The biggest message is, "One size does not fit all." You really need to look at virtual and hybrid events just as any other meeting type. What are you trying to accomplish from the meeting? What is the scope? Carefully think through those elements and make sure you're not just saying, "Let's grab some technology and throw people out onto it." It's really important to do a technology assessment. A lot of companies have Microsoft Teams, Webex or Zoom, and that may work for your internal meetings, but when doing a more produced event, you need to make sure you have a platform that can support that. Think about your attendee engagement journey. You may want a video. You may want some gamification. Do rehearsals [with speakers]. Then make sure you are maximizing your results around the meeting. Also, you have to track. I talked to a customer who is running [a strategic meetings management] program, and their marketing team has shifted to virtual, but they are not registering the meetings. If you don't track the data for these virtual meetings, a year from now you have a big gap in your data in terms of understanding your metrics and continuing to build upon the strength of your SMMP.

RAWYA, AT TAKEDA, HOW HAVE YOU BEEN LOOKING AT

DIFFERENT PLATFORMS AND EVEN MICROTECHNOLOGIES TO HELP YOU DELIVER ON SPECIFIC NEEDS FOR YOUR EVENTS?

RAWYA TULLGREN: Today, with advanced technology, there is this explosion of platforms and solutions. We need to reinvent ourselves and learn that new language. We've worked with our IT and procurement departments and created a global preferred supplier partner list. As Linda said, one size does not fit all. We look at the type of meeting, the complexity of the meeting ... and then we can go to our preferred vendor list and properly match our suppliers to the different virtual meetings type and design requirements. We also created a playbook as a core resource for our team and other stakeholders to help build out virtual capabilities.

CINDY, IS THIS SIMILAR TO THE STRATEGY YOU'VE TAKEN AT ANTHEM?

CINDY HESTON: Our experience with virtual and hybrid is pretty limited, and not because the team didn't consider looking into it. In our business, the demand was very much in-person. When this hit, it was a big shift. It became even more important for us as a company to have effective communication, the ability to get messaging out in different channels rather than just email or video. We started to dive into hybrid meetings ... but didn't think that would happen until the



Cindy Heston



Linda McNairy

second half [of the year]. So we looked at virtual, and that's where we started with the internal team, and with what was currently approved within Anthem. ... [Consider the] materials in the meetings; you're digitally streaming very confidential information. Apps that have different [add-on] features—we cannot do that. Just because it's part of the suite of the product [your company uses] doesn't mean [the add-ons are] approved from the IT security standpoint.

WHAT TYPES OF MEETINGS MAY BE EASIER OR HARDER TO SWITCH TO VIRTUAL OR HYBRID?

MCNAIRY: Some meetings are really easy to flip, like team meetings, all-hands meetings, town halls, keynote-type presentations where there is more one-directional sharing of information. For me, what is exciting is how hybrid is really going to come to life. All data shows and everything we are seeing is that as we return to live meetings, they will be smaller. Rather than bringing your 800 salespeople in for a kickoff meeting, you may be looking at regionalizing folks into smaller groups, and then having certain elements brought together through the hybrid element. We successfully executed an annual meeting for our employees [where] we co-located general sessions and had emcees and hosts at each of the locations. Then, for the time where everybody is logging on and you're sorting out the technical difficulties, a colleague and I had sort of a talk show, where we were interviewing people and filling the time so that as people got onto the line, they weren't just experiencing dead air. ... There are some other types that require more thought, like how do you do fundraisers, or galas? For me, the challenge is let's think through what the important elements of that meeting or event are, and how can you try best to bring that forward.

I LOVE THE TALK SHOW IDEA AS PEOPLE ARE LOGGING IN. ARE THERE ANY BEST PRACTICES THAT MAY ALREADY BE EMERGING?

BONDURANT: If you are not looking at virtual or hybrid—or, using the example Linda had of people circumventing the SMM program and doing their own virtual work in marketing—you really need to be pulling all that together so you can have a comprehensive, holistic view of all the meetings that are taking place, then be able to provide the playbooks and recommendations for folks. You're not going to take a three-day sales meeting and lift it into a virtual platform. But what we are finding is that people don't have the skill sets. They need to upskill and work with suppliers to do that. Looking at best practices, the past few months [of

virtual meetings], people have been forgiving if the technology wasn't working properly or if there wasn't much engagement. But people will have a lower tolerance for things that don't go right. Take the time to understand how to produce these meetings and events ... so there is a lot more engagement and people find it to be fun and educational.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE ADDITIONAL COMPLEXITIES HYBRID MEETINGS BRING?

HESTON: If you look at the three [meeting type] options, hybrid really is the most complex. It also can be more costly because you have your production and the digital streaming aspect of it. One thing we've noticed is content. We would change content in a live meeting on the fly. In virtual, depending on the platform, your production company may not [be able] to make those changes within the same day. ... It [also] is important in hybrid meetings to talk to your audience. There is polling, we have banners that are streaming, 'this is up next,' things like that. [The live event] will be a lot smaller. Let your in-person attendees know your cues are going to wake up the virtual attendees and keep them engaged. Rehearsal is important, and so is your Wi-Fi bandwidth.

WHAT OPPORTUNITIES DOES HYBRID OFFER TO TRACK ENGAGEMENT AND UNDERSTAND WHAT ATTENDEES ARE DOING IN THE MEETING OR CONFERENCE?

HESTON: One of the benefits is more data points. When did attendees actually check in to the meeting? When did they leave the meeting? Did they check in 10 minutes late and leave 10 minutes early? What was their engagement? Every once in a while, ask a question of the audience, like what are your thoughts on the speaker, do you agree, yes or no. Use the metrics and intermix it in your own database to present a really broad picture of the meeting. And tie it into [your] CRM tool to measure the productivity and value of the event.

WILL THE PROLIFERATION OF VIRTUAL AND HYBRID MEETINGS FORCE US TO GET BETTER DATA FROM OUR IN-PERSON MEETINGS?

BONDURANT: We've all struggled with proving the return on investment of our meetings and events. Now, with the hybrid and virtual opportunity, there is wonderful data. What we can do is identify if we are delivering information

“Event marketers are finding that their events are attracting two to three times [the audience] they had anticipated. Some of the benchmarking I've been doing ... has [shown] that without a doubt, hybrid meetings will be here to stay.”

— MEETINGS CONSULTANT BETSY BONDURANT

IN VIRTUAL AND HYBRID, THERE'S A CAPABILITY TO OFFER PRERECORDED AND ADDITIONAL CONTENT THAT YOU CAN'T PRODUCE LIVE. WHAT ARE SOME OPTIONS THAT YOU CAN BRING ONLY TO VIRTUAL?

TULLGREN: For global, you have to think about the prerecorded aspect because if you're having a meeting in the United States and the main speaker is in Japan, it could be 3 a.m. for them. Before, sometimes they would have to wake up [in the middle of the night] to be there, and we literally saw people closing their eyes on the screen. But now with the virtual benefit, we can prerecord them, and it looks exactly as if they are part of the meeting. The time zone is also a big challenge for hybrid [panels], so we use what is called a studio platform, where you can have a panel, but it's more interactive [and includes pre-recorded content], and it overcomes the time zone challenges.

in the right method. And we also [can] determine if we should not be doing some of the meetings we've always done in the past. I'm finding people who are doing a rubric for face-to-face versus virtual versus what is the quality of life for our people. [Companies] also are looking at sustainability. We see some of the data now that the carbon footprint for meetings has dropped 95 percent because no one is on airplanes. [Also] there are still some people who cannot travel to a meeting because of illness or what have you. Now we can be more inclusive. ... You can still participate 100 percent because of the virtual environments involved. To be able to take all that great information and integrate that with CRM tools on the back end is rich information for people who are on the front end, [who can] put all the dots together and come out with some great metrics. ■



Wyndham Unveils Direct-Billing Solution Using Virtual Cards

Wyndham Hotels & Resorts has released a new booking, billing and payment solution that employs unique identification numbers to corporations and allows for transactions without the use of a credit card on the part of the traveler, the company told BTN. Dubbed Wyndham Direct, the product includes virtual card payment through direct channels and real-time access to individual traveler folios, according to Wyndham.

“There is billing and payment, but what makes it even better is the fact that either the traveler or travel arranger makes the reservation through our direct connection, either through the website or call center with the Wyndham Direct number, and it automatically flows through their reservation,” said Wyndham SVP of global sales Carol Lynch. “When they go to check in, they just walk in, give their name, and don’t have to give any type of credit card. It’s easy for the front desk person to identify the fact that they are a Wyndham Direct traveler.”

When guests check out, they don’t receive a folio; it goes directly to the company. Incidentals also can be included. “It’s up to the corporation whether they want to include all charges in the payment system or just room and tax, but the platform allows for all charges to be charged to that Wyndham Direct ID,” Lynch said.

How the payments work is through using integrated virtual credit card technology from financial tech firm Corporate Spending Innovations. All the data sits in one place. Travel managers can then access folios in real time through a portal, allowing them to see where their travelers are staying as well as individual spending data. Travel managers also have custom reporting features.



“Our customers talked about La Quinta direct billing more than anything and what a benefit it was, not just to clients but to the hotels themselves. It was something we knew we would adopt once the brand migrated to our reservation system.”

—WYNDHAM’S CAROL LYNCH

Wyndham introduced the product March 30 at its La Quinta by Wyndham hotels in the United States. It rolled the product out to its Super 8 and Days Inn hotels on July 20. Wyndham plans to add Wyndham Direct to all its U.S. properties by the end of the year. “Today, it’s accessible to 4,000 properties, three of our largest brands,” Lynch said. “Once it’s rolled out to the rest of the brands, we will have over 6,000 hotels in the U.S. alone that have the capability.”

The company plans eventually to roll it out internationally, but has no specific timeline to do so.

Wyndham Direct came about when Wyndham in 2018 acquired the La Quinta brand, which had offered a direct-billing option, Lynch said. “Our customers talked about La Quinta direct billing more than anything and what a benefit it was, not just to clients but to the hotels themselves. It was something we knew we would adopt once the brand migrated to our reservation system. We also knew we had to have a technology platform to do that, whereas La Quinta really did it back of the house, manually. We couldn’t scale that for 6,000 hotels. We found the technology provider CSI, who helped customize the solution for us.”

Wyndham Direct is available to any corporate client, and could benefit in particular small to midsize businesses that might not have a formal travel program or may not use a streamlined booking platform, Lynch said. She cited as an example a logistics company working through the pandemic, a segment she recently told BTN was among the few still booking business travel.

“The company deploys crews to build warehouses, and all these companies started shipping and they couldn’t handle the inventory and had to build warehouses,” Lynch said. “These crews would go out and they might be driving from city to city to city. It was a huge benefit for this organization to be able to set up a billing solution at multiple hotels where they never had to worry about those actual travelers themselves having to pay for their rooms. It became a really streamlined process from booking, to billing and payment.”

Several Hotel Chains Add Guest Mask Requirement in U.S., Canada

Several hotel chains, including Marriott International, Hyatt Hotels Corp., InterContinental Hotels Group, Wyndham Hotels & Resorts and others, in recent weeks have added requirements for guests to wear facial masks in all public areas of its hotels in the U.S. and Canada.

The requirements are in accordance with five key recommendations the American Hotel & Lodging Association made as part

of its Safe Stay health and safety initiative.

The guidelines for hotels and guests, called the Safe Stay Guest Checklist, include requiring face coverings in all indoor public spaces and practicing social distancing in all common areas; choosing contactless options where available, including online reservations, check-ins and payments; considering daily room cleaning only if necessary, and asking the ho-

tel about such options; requesting contactless room service delivery; and refraining from traveling if you have, or recently had, any symptoms of Covid-19 or contact with anyone diagnosed with Covid-19.

Though none of the recommendations are national requirements, the industry trade group is lobbying for national standardization. “Utilizing these best practices, including requiring face coverings and practicing social distancing in public spaces, will create an even safer environment for all our guests and employees,” said AHLA president and CEO Chip Rogers. “We applaud governors who have standardized the use of face coverings in all indoor public spaces, and we urge all lawmakers to help make this a national standard by implementing this requirement in their states.”

Guest Satisfaction with Hotel Cleanliness Reaches Record High in 2020

J.D. Power Survey

Sleep was the main priority for hotel guest satisfaction in last year's J.D. Power North America Hotel Guest Satisfaction Index Study, but this year cleanliness expectations and guest communications not surprisingly are the top drivers for guest satisfaction.

"While the Covid-19 pandemic has certainly amplified the importance of hotel cleanliness, it has historically been an important focal point for hotel guests," said J.D. Power hospitality practice lead Andrea Stokes in a statement. "The other critical variable for the industry right now is proactive communication with guests—both about the specific steps hotels are taking to protect guests and about any service and amenity limitations due to Covid-19."

The overall score for guest satisfaction with room cleanliness in 2020 increased for the fifth consecutive year and reached an all-time-high rating of 8.53 on a 10-point scale. For communications, overall satisfaction scores fall 66 points on average when guests receive no pre-stay communications, according to J.D. Power.

Results also show that guests want hotels to be upfront about their limitations, especially as many properties in North America still are only partially operational or are offering limited amenities. Based on J.D. Power data collected since the beginning of the pandemic, "hotel guests understand the challenges faced by the industry and value direct, honest communications now more than ever before," said the company in the statement.

Only 10 points separate overall satisfaction with upper upscale, upscale and upper midscale hotels, potentially showing that the increased amenities and services the latter two have added are paying off.

J.D. Power 2020 North America Hotel Guest Satisfaction Index Top Performers

Overall scores based on a 1,000-point scale

Luxury	The Luxury Collection (896)
Upper Upscale	Wyndham Grand Hotels (882)
Upscale	Hyatt House (872)
Upper Midscale	Drury Hotels (868)
Midscale	Tru by Hilton (868)
Economy	SureStay Hotel by Best Western (824)

Brand Rankings

The survey ranks hotel brands based on a 1,000-point scale in the six major segments: luxury, upper upscale, upscale, upper midscale, midscale and economy. The only hotel brand that repeated its 2019 stay atop a segment is upper midscale Drury Hotels, which has led the segment for a record 15 consecutive years.

Shaking up the midscale and economy segments were two newcomers in the top spots: Tru by Hilton and SureStay Hotel by Best Western, respectively. Each launched in 2016.

"A new brand can come in and can win the category potentially. It does happen, but not always," Stokes told BTN. "This year it just so happens we had two new brands [do so]. It's interesting, when a brand can come into a category and competitors have to look at what that new brand is doing and how to compete."

Stokes added that both brands were included in the survey last year, but didn't have enough feedback to be ranked. "It usually takes a couple of years to grow and have enough properties, and we have to find these guests in the general population. This year we could rank them, and were able to find enough guests and hotel stays in our data."

Marriott International brands took the two top spots for luxury, with The Luxury Collection earning a score of 896 points and The Ritz-Carlton, last year's No. 1, with 888 points. Wyndham Grand Hotels, which didn't make the rankings last year, led the upper upscale category with 866 points. In upscale, Hyatt House leapfrogged from No. 5 last year to first this year, earning a score of 872.

Satisfaction by Tier

About 75 percent of respondents were leisure travelers, with the remaining 25 percent business travelers, including those who also added a leisure component. Business traveler satisfaction scores for the chain segments not surprisingly were better for luxury (859 points) than midscale (817 points) and economy (775 points).

Still, there wasn't much of a difference among the remaining tiers. Only 10 points separate the overall satisfaction with upper upscale (845 points), upscale (843 points) and upper midscale (835 points) hotels, potentially showing that the increased amenities and services the latter two tiers have added in recent years—like complimentary breakfast and Wi-Fi—were paying off and making them more competitive with upper upscale options. This also could be of use for travel managers as they look to build their hotel programs for 2021, with an eye for increased value.

The 2020 J.D. Power North America Hotel Guest Satisfaction Index Study is based on responses from 37,843 hotel guests for stays from May 2019 through March 2020. It posed 150 questions and benchmarked the performance of 102 brands. The survey typically runs a full year, "but this year we ended the survey about nine weeks early because of the pandemic," Stokes said. ■



DHS Reverses New York Trusted Traveler Ban

Agency Acknowledges 'Misleading Statements'

BY MICHAEL B. BAKER



N.Y. Gov. Andrew Cuomo

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security last month lifted a ban on New York residents joining and renewing memberships in Trusted Traveler programs and now faces additional legal action from the state.

DHS issued the ban in February, citing the state's "green light" law concerning the issuance of driver's licenses. The law enables all New Yorkers age 16 or older to apply for non-commercial driver's licenses regardless of citizenship status and without a Social Security number and blocks immigration and border officials from accessing the New York Department of Motor Vehicles' database, enabling undocumented residents to obtain driver's licenses without fear of retribution from immigration officials.

In a statement last month, DHS said New York has amended the law

"It was a clear abuse of government power for political purposes. It has hurt New Yorkers and hurt our economy, and it's only one in a barrage of political abuses that we've endured by this federal government."

—N.Y. GOV. ANDREW CUOMO

to allow sharing records as needed for individuals applying for Trusted Traveler programs. DHS is continuing to challenge the law but has lifted those restrictions.

"We appreciate the information sharing to [U.S. Customs and Border Protection] for the trusted travel program, which enables DHS to move forward and begin once again processing New York residents under the Trusted Travel Program," Acting DHS Secretary Chad Wolf said in a statement. "Nonetheless, local New York law continues to maintain provisions that undermine the security of the American people and purport to criminalize information sharing between law enforcement entities."

New York already had sued both DHS and CBP over the ban, and in a filing related to that suit, DHS noted it had made "inaccurate or misleading statements" regarding New York's law, according to a report from NPR. Several other states have similar laws but were not hit with Trusted Traveler bans.

In a briefing last month, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo said New York could be owed civil damages from the ban and called on U.S. Congress to investigate DHS's handling of the ban.

"It was a clear abuse of government power for political purposes," Cuomo said. "It has hurt New Yorkers and hurt our economy, and it's only one in a barrage of political abuses that we've endured by this federal government." ■

Canada's GardaWorld Acquires WorldAware

BY CHRIS DAVIS

GardaWorld Security Corp., a Montreal-based security management firm, last month announced it had acquired WorldAware, the U.S.-based risk management firm founded by Bruce McIndoe and once known as iJet. The deal closed July 10, according to GardaWorld.

GardaWorld calls itself "the largest privately owned security services and cash services company in the world," and says it has "field operations and extensive security network in 45 countries." The company operates Crisis24, a security risk management business. The combined Crisis24 and WorldAware will "advise and serve" more than one-quarter of the Fortune 500, according to GardaWorld.

"WorldAware is a leader in this field, and coupled with Crisis24, no other player will be able to measure up to the expertise we can now offer, and the

powerful blend of talent, experience, strength and international in-the-field security operations we bring to the table," GardaWorld founder, president and CEO Stephan Crétier said in a statement.

WorldAware predecessor iJet was founded by McIndoe in 1999. The company in 2016 acquired WorldAware and two years later renamed the company. Formed two years before the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, led to an industrywide reconsideration of business travel risk and security management, iJet, then WorldAware, for decades has been a key player in offering those services to the marketplace.

"Over the last several years, the market has recognized a greater need for risk management services; this has fueled industry growth, new entrants and technological innovation," McIndoe wrote in an email

to BTN. "WorldAware needed a way to keep pace, to accelerate innovation and drive more value. GardaWorld and WorldAware have a shared vision on the future of the market, the importance of forewarning and the value of an integrated risk management offering."

WorldAware and Crisis24 "at this time" will "continue to operate under their respective brands and technologies, ensuring a smooth service delivery throughout the integration process," according to GardaWorld. McIndoe, who before the deal served as president of WorldAware, said in the email, "I have a long-term consulting contract with WorldAware to support the transition and will continue to engage in the market providing education and thought leadership."

Financial terms of the deal were undisclosed; both companies are privately held. ■



Apartment-Style Provider Jurny Inks Expansion Deals One Month After Launch

BY DONNA M. AIROLDI

While some apartment-style accommodation providers have been hit hard during the pandemic with the need to close locations and lay off staff or go out of business, new-entrant Jurny decided the timing was right to come out of stealth mode in June, and in July managed to ink new deals that will expand the company internationally.

Operating for about two years already, Jurny made its launch official in June with the announcement of \$2.75 million raised earlier this year, led by Okapi Venture Capital and Mucker Capital. It currently operates about 160 units in Dallas, Miami and Nashville, and in July signed deals to increase its presence in the latter two cities, as well as expand to London and Tel Aviv, which will bring the units available to 200, but it has another 2,500 in the company's pipeline, including a site in Los Angeles, co-founder and president David Phillips told BTN.

"The timeframe [of bringing the units online] depends on the deal. Some we will close agreements on in the next two to three weeks and will go live anywhere from 90 days to six months to a year," Phillips said. "We're working on a [letter of intent] now for 150 units in downtown Los Angeles, but that will be a remodel into a Jurny hotel, so that will take about a year."

It also zones a majority of its units as hotels, so it is compliant with local laws and able to offer nightly rates. The current average length of stay is three nights, Phillips said.

Prior to Covid-19 wreaking havoc on the accommodation industry, Jurny's guest breakdown was 45 percent each for business and leisure, and 10 percent extended stay. During the pandemic, those numbers shifted to 35 percent leisure, 25 percent business and 40 percent extended stay, Phillips confirmed.

Another reason Jurny emerged from stealth mode, Phillips said, was because the company has been able to drive profits for its owners even during the pandemic. "We have 100 percent retention of all owners," he said, adding that the company is about 30 percent above competing hotels in occupancy, with "pick-ups in July and August, average daily rates improving, occupancies improving, which is a good sign."

The business model for Jurny is not unlike others in the space: to provide a highly designed product that uses technology to automate the guest experience for a completely contactless and on-demand stay. One way it differs, Phillips said, is that the company signs management agreements as opposed to master leases.

"There was the temptation to grow quickly and very early, but we knew if we focused on doing things no one else was doing, the opportunity in the long run was to have a massive competitive advantage and create long-term value ... [which] will work only if we are the management company and align interests with the owners," he said. "It might be a little bit of an uphill battle in the beginning to sign management agreements instead of master leases, but once we start executing and delivering, adding value and improving the bottom line, they'll want to grow with us."

Typically, in master leases, the owners do not have any involvement in the operations of the leased units. In management company leases, the owner and operator work more closely together. In the end, it will depend on the details of the contract, and there



"We're not turning contactless now because of what is going on. We've always held to that standard because that is what we believe people want anyway."

—JURNY'S DAVID PHILLIPS

are varying scenarios as to which provides more risk and return for the parties involved.

Another differentiator, Phillips said, is that everything is contactless. "We've been contactless for two years, and our listings and reviews reflect that," he said. "We're not turning contactless now because of what is going on. We've always held to that standard because that is what we believe people want anyway."

In addition, everything is on-demand. While Jurny units are available on the major online travel agency sites, the company also released its app in June, allowing guests to book directly, as well as use it for all facets of their stay. "You build your [Jurny] profile once, and you have instant access and booking capability for any Jurny anywhere in the world as a user of the app," Phillips said.

Further to booking, guests can check in and check out through the app, use their smartphone as their key, they can share an access code with other guests on the reservation, they can contact customer service through the app, they can request on-demand cleaning—which follows a 150-point U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention-compliant checklist—and they can control the thermostat prior to their arrival.

"That ease of use sets us apart," Phillips added.

Jurny isn't currently working with any specific corporations, Phillips said, but added that as he and his partner build the team and company further, they'll reach out to corporate travel companies. It also is targeting Millennials and Generation Z travelers, "because those are the people who appreciate the automation and empowerment the most," Phillips said, explaining that they are the consumers who led the need for on-demand streaming, for food delivery, for drivers, "and they want their on-demand hospitality as well."

Still, Phillips used himself and his partner as typical business travelers: They always use a two-bedroom Jurny unit with separate bedrooms and bathrooms but a common living area where they can work "and be more productive than ever," he said. "We're businesspeople, and I think it'll be a great solution for them, especially as travel restrictions lift." ■



Southwest to End Basic-Level Content Model with Sabre

BY MICHAEL B. BAKER & JAY BOEHMER

Southwest Airlines at the end of this year will end the “basic booking request” model through which it had worked with Sabre for decades, Southwest Business VP Dave Harvey told BTN.

The BBR model, a bare-bones content agreement through which agents using Sabre can see Southwest’s flight schedules but have limited capability for servicing bookings, has been in place since the 1990s as part of a “longstanding and healthy relationship with Sabre,” Harvey said. That model “served us well” but has been a growing source of “friction” for customers in terms of workflow and working with the legacy technology involved, he said.

“It’s also very limited in where we want to take future offerings, things we might want to come to market with, so at this point in time, it’s time to sunset [Sabre’s BBR model],” Harvey said.

In the meantime, Southwest has drastically altered its distribution strategy over the past year by signing agreements with both Travelport and Amadeus that provide content and full booking capabilities in their respective global distribution systems. Its content went live in Travelport’s Apollo and Worldspan GDSs in early May and in Galileo earlier this month, and Harvey said content should be available in Amadeus by the end of the third quarter.

Southwest had been in negotiations with Sabre for enhanced GDS participation as well but announced in January that those talks had ended.

Harvey did not give an exact number of customers currently using the BBR solution with Sabre, though he said it was a “large number.” That includes a “healthy number of business customers,” Southwest senior director of B2B strategy and services Rob Brown said, particularly as the model was the only means of booking Southwest content outside of direct channels for years until the airline reached a limited content agreement with Galileo in 2007.

Besides the recent content agreements, South-



“At some point, you just need to call it and move forward and begin to move forward the platforms and the companies you can do business with.”

—SOUTHWEST’S TOM NEALON

west also has opened up its distribution options, including its API, which went live in 2010, and Swabiz. As such, most customers using the BBR with Sabre are using a hybrid set-up, and “very few” use that as their only method, Harvey said.

“We have broadened the channel portfolio and given other ways that customers can connect to Southwest, so we’re coming to the marketplace with a portfolio of options,” Brown said.

‘Challenging to Work With’

Southwest president Tom Nealon in July during the carrier’s second-quarter earnings call said the airline no longer is engaged in talks with Sabre after two years of fruitless attempts to reach a new distribution pact.

“I’ve worked with Sabre since, I don’t know, 2001 or 2002,” said Nealon. “It’s always a challenge. It’s a good company, but they’re challenging to work with. We’ve been working for two years to get a contract. At some point, you just need to call it and move forward and begin to move forward the platforms and the companies you can do business with.”

Nealon said Southwest is “still using Sabre’s GetThere product,” which some corporate clients use for online bookings. “We are still using some of Sabre’s data translation migration products,” he added. “Sabre is a good technology company. We’ve just had a really tough time cracking the nut on how we conduct business, one with the other, in this GDS world. So, that’s where we are. So, there are no conversations going on at this point. I don’t expect there to be any conversations going on at this point for some period of time.”

Sabre in a statement said it would continue efforts to reach a new distribution agreement with Southwest and that the BBR contract accounts for only “an inconsequential percentage” of Sabre’s global air bookings, so it would have “little to no bearing on the parties’ ongoing negotiations.”

“In the meantime, travel buyers will be able to access the same Southwest content as always through Sabre, and there will be no disruption to accessing Southwest content at this time,” according to Sabre’s statement.

Sabre Travel Solutions president Dave Shirk during Sabre’s second-quarter earnings call in August said: “We are open and continue to be open to reengaging negotiations when Southwest is ready, and we believe that ultimately there will be a path to reach a new GDS agreement with them at some point in the future.” ■

ABC Global Services Acquires CCRA

BY DONNA M. AIROLDI

Travel management company services provider ABC Global Services has acquired CCRA, which provides TMCs with call center services as well as negotiated hotel rates and airline programs. Together, they offer combined corporate and leisure opportunities for their hotel and other

supplier partners, they said.

For 2021, ABC and CCRA, also known as the Travel Commerce Network, will offer all existing and new hotel partners reduced participation fees, marketing inclusions, package discounts and increased distribution opportunities

in an effort to help the industry recover from the effects of Covid-19, the companies said in a statement.

Some of the companies’ combined services include a global hotel program that includes more than 50,000 hotels offering discounts, amenities, deals and commission specials; an air program that offers discounts and commissions on more than 40 international airlines; HotelConnex, a division that enables TMCs to offer clients competitive hotel consulting and sourcing services; and event and meeting planning logistics.

Terms of the deal were undisclosed; both companies are privately held. ■



IAG, Air France Grapple With Pandemic's Effects

BY MOLLY DYSON

British Airways owner International Airlines Group is looking to raise €2.75 billion in capital as it announced a first-half loss of more than €4 billion as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The group said the fundraising, supported by Qatar Airways, its largest shareholder, will help to boost its balance sheet by reducing financial leverage and increasing its overall liquidity position, which as of June 30 stood at €8.1 billion—only €500 million less than its liquidity at the end of 2019. The group has also completed the sale and leaseback of five aircraft, raising about €380 million, and recently agreed to extend its partnership with American Express in a deal worth £750 million, part of which is the pre-purchase of Avios points that American Express will utilize in the U.K. and globally for its BA-branded cards and membership rewards program.

Passenger traffic across the group fell 98.4 percent year over year in Q2, with capacity down 95.3 percent as the coronavirus pandemic gripped the world and brought air traffic to a virtual halt. IAG chief executive Willie Walsh said the company does not expect passenger demand to recover to 2019 levels until at least 2023, causing each of its airlines to “adjust their business and reduce their cost base to reflect forecast demand in their markets not just to get through this crisis but to ensure they remain competitive in a structurally changed industry.”

BA, which placed a large number of its staff on furlough under the U.K. government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, is planning to make up to 12,000 redundancies as it restructures. The British Airline Pilots Association said its members have voted to accept a temporary 20 percent pay cut and 270 pilot job losses at BA in order to avoid 1,255 redundancies and the mass firing and rehiring of the airline's pi-

“The uncertainties linked to the health situation, the opening of borders and the general economic situation are very strong. We must also adapt to important changes in customers' behavior.”

—AIR FRANCE-KLM'S BENJAMIN SMITH

lots. The pay cut will reduce to 8 percent over the next two years and remuneration will eventually return to normal, according to the union.

Walsh plans to step down in September after delaying his retirement to see IAG through what he believed at the time would be the worst of the impact of the pandemic. Iberia CEO Luis Gallego will succeed him as group chief executive.

Air France-KLM Posts Q2 Loss

Meanwhile, the Air France-KLM group has reported a loss of €2.6 billion for the second quarter of 2020, leading to a €4.4 billion loss for the half-year to June 30.

Air France-KLM said passenger numbers were down 95.6 percent year over year in the second quarter, with unit revenue falling 42.8 percent. When looking at the group's individual components, Air France and its subsidiaries lost more than €1 billion, while KLM reported a loss of €493 million. Transavia posted a negative result of €111 million.

The €2.6 billion loss compares with a profit of €97 million for the same quarter last year.

The group has shored up its liquidity to €14.2 billion thanks largely to €10.4 billion in emergency aid from the French and Dutch governments. Air France-KLM said the reserves will allow it to “weather the crisis and restructure its business.”

Air France is planning to cut 6,560 jobs from its workforce by the end of 2022 as part of its recovery plan, which includes the early retirement of its Airbus A380 fleet. A further 1,020 jobs will go at Hop, and KLM said 2,000 staff have already signed up for voluntary redundancy. The group has warned of the need to “significantly reduce the number of employees” in order to survive a recovery that it expects will take several years.

Air France-KLM CEO Benjamin Smith commented: “The uncertainties linked to the health situation, the opening of borders and the general economic situation are very strong. We must also adapt to important changes in customers' behavior. This context pushes us to accelerate our transformation to improve our economic and environmental performance according to the main pillars of our strategic plan. ■

Avis Budget Ponders Corp. Travel Opportunity

BY MICHAEL B. BAKER

Avis Budget's second-quarter revenue was only a third of what it was a year ago, but the company expects revenue for the rest of the year will at least cover costs.

The car rental company reported revenue of \$760 million for the quarter, down 67 percent year over year. Rental days were down 59 percent year over year and by about the same rate for rentals both inside and out-

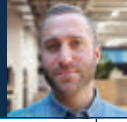
side the Americas.

Even so, the company has seen “consistent sequential week-over-week increases” in rental volume, culminating in “their best volume to date” in late July thanks to increased leisure activity, Avis Budget Group CEO Joe Ferraro said. In June, revenue was down 59 percent year over year, compared with a 78 percent decrease in April.

While rentals nearly are all leisure at this point, the company expects it could gain some new corporate business as companies figure out their travel programs amid the pandemic.

“The question is going to be: What do travel policies look like coming out of this?” CFO John North said during an earnings call. “Is there an opportunity for us to pick up some share going forward if corporate travelers are moving around and are more likely to rent a car than take a flight? Are they more likely to rent a car versus hopping into a ride-hail vehicle? Those are things we've certainly thought about.”

Avis Budget Group reported a net loss of \$481 million for the quarter, compared with net income of \$62 million in the second quarter of 2019. ■



Amex Sees Full Force of Covid-19 on Q2 Commercial Card Spending



The global Covid-19 pandemic battered American Express's corporate card division during the second quarter, with plummeting T&E-related spending dragging the segment to a \$60 million net quarterly loss, the company said last month.

American Express Global Commercial Services reported \$82.4 billion in card-billed business for the second quarter, a 36 percent year-over-year decline. Average quarterly cardmember spending dropped an identical 36 percent from the prior year to \$5,645, the company said.

Airline spending went to essentially nil, with airline-related spending volume comprising 0 percent of billed business on all American Express cards.

Given that Q2 was the first quarter to feel the full brunt of the pandemic's ravaging effect on the global economy, the bleak spending figures came as little surprise to observers or Amex itself. During the company's first-quarter earnings report in April, it projected T&E-related spending volume would plummet by 95 percent year over year in the second quarter.

That prediction turned out to be overly dire, but only slightly; T&E spending was down 87 percent for the second quarter. Meanwhile, airline spending went to essentially nil, with airline-related spending volume comprising 0 percent of billed business on all American Express cards.

Total GCS second-quarter revenue net of interest expense was \$2.3 billion, down from \$3.3 billion a year ago, primarily reflecting "a decline in card member spending" and a lower average discount rate compared to the prior year, Amex reported. Segment expenses were down 30 percent, to \$1.6 billion, primarily reflecting "significantly lower customer engagement costs" due to the spending slowdown. However, factoring in a \$645 million provision for credit losses—up from \$206 million a year ago—along with other costs, brought GCS's net income into the red for the quarter.

Looking ahead to a potential gradual recovery from the pandemic's shock to the global economy, American Express chairman and CEO Stephen Squeri expressed optimism in noting that overall Amex spending volumes, "which declined to their lowest point this quarter in April, gradually improved in May and June," with small businesses the most resilient in bouncing back. ■

Emburse Adds Payment Piece to Chrome River

Emburse continues to bulk up its corporate payment offerings, launching this month a new pre-approved payment card service integrated within the conglomerate's Chrome River expense platform. Dubbed Emburse Pay, the system is built around cards that can be pre-approved for specific expenses requested through Chrome River.

Once a requested expense is pre-approved, the employee is issued a virtual or plastic prepaid Visa Emburse Card. The card can be restricted for use within particular date ranges, specific merchant types and/or requested spend amounts, enabling spending managers to ensure policy compliance and prevent out-of-policy spend, Emburse said. When an employee uses the Emburse Card for an approved expense, they receive a real-time notification prompting them to capture an image of the receipt. The uploaded receipt then is automatically matched with the

transaction record and an expense line item is created.

Chrome River is the second expense brand under the Emburse umbrella to launch a companion payment card, following Abacus, which added an integrated card in February—a month after the company rebranded under the overarching Emburse banner. Emburse plans to roll out additional payment cards under its other brands—including Certify, Nexonia and Tallie—in the future, and Emburse CEO Eric Friedrichsen said a broader corporate payments initiative will add a range of additional capabilities around expense payments, reimbursement, spend workflow and accounts payable payments.

TRAVELBANK, UPSIDE PARTNER

Meanwhile, TravelBank now is offering its expense management platform through the platform of unmanaged and lightly managed corporate travel booking spe-

cialist Upside Business Travel, the first step in a new strategic partnership between the companies.

Under the agreement, Upside clients will be prompted to enroll with TravelBank when booking a trip in Upside's travel platform. From there, the integration will "evolve over time" to address the needs of corporate travelers and managers in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, such as reconciling unused airline tickets and supporting contactless payments via virtual cards, the companies said.

In the short term, the pact helps TravelBank access a new potential audience for its expense management service, given Upside's focus on serving companies with unmanaged or lightly managed travel programs—many of which don't have dedicated expense management providers, said TravelBank co-founder and CEO Duke Chung

"For us, the partnership helps broaden our client base by providing another channel for us to reach more business travelers and provide them and their companies with more holistic financial insight, beyond a travel budget," Chung noted.

In April, TravelBank added new functionality to its expense management platform designed to support work-from-home expenses, which have become more relevant with the Covid-19 pandemic freezing the vast majority of business travel. Simultaneously, TravelBank also rolled out a new subscription-based pricing model, shifting from a per-transaction structure. ■

CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

EU Data Privacy

quired data controllers, which can include travel managers, to review standard contractual clauses, the most common process used in the corporate travel industry to protect data exports outside the EU. SCCs—also called model contractual clauses—are inserted into contracts to guarantee legally that service providers will treat data compliantly.

According to the EDPB, data transfers using SCCs, or an SCC alternative deployed by large multinational corporations known as Binding Corporate Rules, must be reassessed for whether they offer equivalent protection to the EU's General Data Protection Regulation. Since the ECJ ruling also stated there is no equivalent protection in the U.S. because of lack of redress for data subjects and American laws permitting mass data surveillance, the validity of SCCs for U.S.-bound transfers is in doubt.

Biehl urged travel managers to hold urgent consultations with their TMCs and online booking tool providers.

"What the ECJ decision told us is we all need to be accountable and responsible for the data that emanates from us," said Samantha Simms, a corporate travel data protection specialist who is principal consultant and founder of the Information Collective. "If your TMC has asked you to agree to certain SCCs, you should be asking them to what extent they are carrying out impact assess-

"Data is more expensive in the EU than other regions. We will see this reflected in agreements... which will start to pass some of these costs on to the corporate customer."

— INFORMATION COLLECTIVE'S SAMANTHA SIMMS

ments and how are they going to manage U.S. hosting."

The EDPB is assessing what supplementary legal, technical and organizational measures could be introduced to maintain SCCs and BCRs as legitimate mechanisms for overseeing data transfer to the U.S. Its guidance discusses obtaining data subjects' consent as one answer to the problem—but only for "occasional" use.

"Travel managers would have to go to travelers and get consent from them that they are okay with the data transfer," said Biehl. "That's a process you don't want to have. It's a lot of bureaucracy. You would have to liaise with your HR department to ensure that whatever you did was acceptable. This can only be a solution for the short term to make individual trips possible. It's not a process that can be used for regular data transfer."

If an assessment finds no supplementary measures can be relied on as adequate, the EDPB confirmed companies must be prepared to remove contractual permissions within their supply chain.

Another potential solution would be for travel companies to store their data in Europe. This too has challenges. According to Simms, the Clarifying Lawful Overseas Use of Data Act of 2018 allows the US government access to U.S. company data no matter the jurisdiction in which it is held.

Also, Simms warned, "Commercially this will place US companies operating in the EU in a very difficult position. Data is more expensive in the EU than other regions. We will see this reflected in agreements... which will start to pass some of these costs on to the corporate customer."

Biehl believes storage inside the EU would merit a higher price tag. "I think corporate customers would be ready to pay more if they thought their data was being treated compliantly," he said. ■

BTNGROUP

Louis Magliaro, Executive Vice President & Group Publisher
973.769.0028 • lmagliaro@thebtngroup.com

EDITORIAL

Elizabeth West
Editorial Director
732.494.1955 • ewest@thebtngroup.com

Jay Boehmer
Editor-in-Chief, The Beat
646.380.6249 • jboehmer@thebtngroup.com

Chris Davis
Managing Editor
646.380.6248 • cdavis@thebtngroup.com

Michael B. Baker
Senior Editor, Transportation
646.380.6250 • mbaker@thebtngroup.com

Donna M. Airoidi
Senior Editor, Lodging & Meetings
646.380.6264 • dairoidi@thebtngroup.com

Adam Perrotta
Editor, Payment & Technology
518.859.5117 • aperrotta@thebtngroup.com

Dawit Habtemariam
Staff Writer & Assistant Editor
646.380.6267 • dhabtemariam@thebtngroup.com

James Jarnot
Art Director
646.380.6252 • jjarnot@thebtngroup.com

DIGITAL

Alexandra Mancini
Digital Director
201.902.1984 • amancini@thebtngroup.com

SALES

Lindsay Straub
Associate Publisher
646.380.6274 • lstraub@thebtngroup.com

Rich Markus
Business Development Director
301.944.4324 • rmarkus@thebtngroup.com

Claire LaVelle
Business Development Coordinator
646.380.6271 • clavelle@thebtngroup.com

Debbie Anderson
Hawaii
808.739.2200 • debbieanderson@dmhawaii.com

Michiko Kawano
Japan • +81-3-3661-6138 • kawano-pbi@gol.com

Lavender Tan
Singapore
(65) 9752 8613 • lavtan@singnet.com.sg

PRODUCTION

Michele Garth
Production Manager
201.902.1930 • mgarth@ntmlc.com

Lisa Gonzales
Gayle Graizzaro
Production Specialists
201.902.2000
lgonzales@ntmlc.com • ggraizzaro@ntmlc.com

CONFERENCES & CONTENT SOLUTIONS

David Meyer
Executive Director of Conference Content & Strategy
646.380.6246 • dmeyer@thebtngroup.com

Mary Ann McNulty
Executive Director of Content Solutions
630.519.4510 • mmculty@thebtngroup.com

Jen Bankard
Director of Content Solutions & Conferences
717.460.1091 • jbankard@thebtngroup.com

Melissa Gain
Event Manager
917.626.8832 • mgain@thebtngroup.com

Mariza Moreira
Group Design Manager
201.902.1965 • mmoreira@ntmlc.com

MARKETING

Max Bzdyk
Marketing Manager
646.346.5676 • mbzdyk@thebtngroup.com

LIST RENTAL & Reprints

Danielle Zaborski • MeritDirect for list rental
914.368.1090 • dzaborski@meritdirect.com

Robbie Ray • Wright's Media for reprints
877.652.5295 • northstar@wrightsmedia.com



Thomas L. Kemp
Chairman & Chief Executive Officer

Lisa Cohen
Chief Financial Officer

Robert G. Sullivan
President, Travel Group

Matthew Yorke
Chief Digital Officer

David Blansfield
Executive Vice President & Group Publisher

Arnie Weissmann
Executive Vice President & Editorial Director

Janine L. Bavoso
Senior Vice President, Human Resources

Roberta Muller
Senior Vice President,
Product Development & Production

Ankeet Patel
Senior Vice President, Technology

Sheila Rice
Vice President, Information Products Group

Elizabeth Koesser
Vice President, Database Products

BTNG Group Editorial & Sales Offices • 116 W. 32nd St., 14th Floor, New York, NY 10001 • www.businesstravelnews.com | **Subscription Services** • 800.231.3776 • btn@omeda.com • Business Travel News, PO Box 2007, Skokie, IL 60076-2007 • www.businesstravelnews.com/subscribe

Corporate Offices • 100 Lighting Way, 2nd Floor, Secaucus, NJ 07094 • www.northstartravelgroup.com

logistics that have weathered the pandemic in ways others couldn't. Choice Hotels even reported its extended-stay WoodSpring Suites brand in the last week of July matched the occupancy levels of the year prior.

But a recovery that tilts toward leisure travel and lower-tier hotels within driving distance leaves out huge swaths of the business travel industry, and airlines in particular are adjusting their expectations as a result.

The International Air Transport Association, for example, late last month announced it now did not expect full recovery of global air demand to pre-Covid levels until 2024, a year later than it projected a few months before. Lufthansa Group chairman and CEO Carsten Spohr this month also pointed to 2024 as his company's projected date for full recovery.

"Domestic traffic improvements notwithstanding, international traffic, which in normal times accounts for close to two-thirds of global air travel, remains virtually nonexistent," IATA director general and CEO Alexandre de Juniac said in a statement. "Summer—our industry's busiest season—is passing by rapidly, with little chance for an upswing in international air travel unless governments move quickly and decisively to find alternatives to border closures, confidence-destroying stop-start re-openings and demand-killing quarantine."

Governments have not found alternatives. In fact, the United Kingdom in recent weeks expanded the roster of countries from which travelers must self-isolate for two weeks—including one, Spain, with only six hours or so of advance notice, infuriating travelers and suppliers alike. In the United States, intrastate quarantine guidelines have advanced, with New York and New Jersey, among others, requiring two weeks' self-isolation for visitors or returnees from dozens of other states.

Meanwhile, the United States continues to forbid entry to travelers from Europe, China and other locations, with some exceptions, and the rest of the world largely has barred Americans entry. In contrast with IATA, Delta Air Lines CEO Ed Bastian, during an interview on NPR, suggested governments' top priority should not be fighting such restrictions, and instead should be restoring traveler confidence by finding a Covid-19 treatment.

"The bottom line is we've got to restore confidence amongst our consumer base in air travel," Bastian said. "We need demand back. We need a medical cure. We need a vaccine. We need therapeutics. And I think that's probably where any government focus ought to go," he said.

Until there's a vaccine, whenever that may be, air demand won't exceed even half of pre-Covid levels, United Airlines EVP and chief commercial officer Andrew Nocella predicted during the carrier's second-quarter earnings call last month.

"We continue to believe a full recovery is contingent upon effective therapeutics and a vaccine," Nocella said. "Our best guess is demand, as measured by revenue, will recover over time to be down approximately 50 percent [year over year] and then plateau at that level until a vaccine is widely distributed."

Masking Agreement

While they wait for such a vaccine to be developed and rolled out, U.S. carriers have focused on one way to help limit the spread of Covid-19: expanding face covering requirements on their airplanes and in airports. Seemingly frustrated at the unwillingness of a portion

"The bottom line is we've got to restore confidence amongst our consumer base in air travel. We need demand back. We need a medical cure. We need a vaccine. We need therapeutics. And I think that's probably where any government focus ought to go."

—DELTA'S ED BASTIAN

of their clientele to willingly do so, carriers throughout the summer have broadened their regulations, stiffened penalties for noncompliance, and in some cases refused to consider any exception for passengers over the age of 2 years old.

"It is a distinctly small minority that don't want to wear a mask," United CEO Scott Kirby said during United's earning call last month. "The vast majority of our employees and customers already follow the mask policy because they recognize it's the right thing to do for the safety of everyone."

Several hotel chains, too, have introduced mask requirements for guests in public places, in conjunction with an American Hotel & Lodging Association guideline (see story, page 16). And while most hotel chains are in the same dire financial straits as airlines, at least one CEO didn't quite share the carriers' pessimism regarding future business travel demand.

"When you wake up in two to three years, we'll have a raging debate that business travel will never be the same, and it will look like that because businesses have been hobbled, and it will be lower for a while," Hilton Worldwide president and CEO Christopher Nassetta said this month during the company's second-quarter earnings call. "But I think we'll find in three years it will be more like it was in '18 and '19 than it is now. ... One way or another, we will have similar levels of demand both for business transient and group. People will want to congregate."

Whether business travel will ever be the same remains to be seen, as does the timing of a recovery, but in the short term, suppliers have no choice but to sharply scale back any expectations of a turnaround.

For example, small business bookings from Texas increased between April and mid-June, when the state had entered a new phase of reopening, according to American Airlines chief revenue officer Vasu Raja. But larger corporate bookings during that period "didn't really change at all," even as Texas reopened, he said last month during the carrier's second-quarter earnings call.

"It's likely to think that for a period of time that business bookings as we've historically thought of them will be different, and companies are unlikely to go and resume their economic life, and there's a lot of uncertainty around what smaller companies will do," Raja said. "We are planning for some very conservative assumptions."

Since mid-June, Covid-19 cases in Texas sharply spiked to new highs and the state reimplemented restrictions on indoor gathering, among other facets. And while government restrictions certainly have played a key role in grounding business travel, U.S. Travel Association president and CEO Roger Dow suggested another significant obstacle was closer to home: corporate policies that currently restrict business travel.

"This was brought up as a problem as to how we are going to get these policies to change, and the corporate travel director is looking at what we are doing as an industry," Dow said last month during a webinar hosted by the Meetings Mean Business coalition. "Right now, no matter what we do, until they change those policies, it's going to be very hard."

Dow suggested corporate lawyers are advising human resources executives to instruct wary employees not to travel if they feel unsafe. As a result, USTA is pushing the federal government for liability protection for facilities on a national level, at least through 2021, Dow said. ■

Fail This Test and Our Industry Dies

BY SCOTT GILLESPIE

Covid-19 has cratered the business travel industry. It has created deep anxieties that go to the heart of traveling. It is a giant foe, one that we're all figuring out how to fight. Great progress has been made by travel suppliers on the health and hygiene front. Travel management companies and technology firms are providing health-related apps; travel managers are adapting travel policies and educating travelers about risks and precautions; thoughtful standards and guidelines are being set.

All good, important and very necessary work. In time, the virus will be defeated and people will be willing to travel again. But this will not be nearly enough.

The Larger, More Enduring Threat

The business travel industry now faces a much larger post-Covid threat. It is the ROI test: "Will this trip be worth the cost and risk?"

The risks of traveling are perceived as very high, and the acceptance of travel's substitute, the Zoom meeting, is incredibly broad. The Covid risks will come down, but the cost of a Zoom meeting will remain very cheap. This low-cost, well-accepted travel substitute makes it hard to justify any number of business trips.

Fail this ROI test too many times, and our industry dies.

Who Decides?

Unfortunately, the return on travel's investment can't be calculated, not with clarity and consensus, and not at scale. Every potential trip's ROI is subjective. This is a problem not for the corporate travel manager, and not for the procurement buyer. We have to leave those subjective ROI assessments to the only stakeholder that matters—the travel budget owner, the person who controls this industry's lifeblood.

Many companies are struggling with the question of when and at what pace they should return to traveling. These firms recognize the need to balance traveler health and safety with the advantages of conducting business in person. Right now, Covid risks are dominating the travel budget owner's bandwidth.

Travel budget owners need good answers to these questions:

- Do we have a good handle on this trip's goals, costs and risks?



Scott Gillespie is CEO of U.S.-based industry data consultancy tClara.

"We must now also showcase our singular competitive advantage—the power and benefits of creating valuable connections."

- Do our travelers and their hosts welcome this trip?
- Will meeting in person improve our chances of success?

It's that last question that we must now rally around.

A Call to Action

Travel suppliers, especially the network airlines, need to showcase the many benefits of making connections in person. Not just a new connection made over a cup of coffee. The types of connections that generate significant value, connections that link ideas to innovation; presentations to sales; leadership to motivation; diversity to inclusion, training to new skills. Connections that are made with sparks that can come only from the conducive atmosphere of meeting safely together in person.

This is business travel's main competitive advantage over the virtual meeting. Clearly, the costs and risks associated with Covid-19 must be reduced. But our industry's size, health and future ultimately depend on growing this one value proposition, the advantage of meeting safely in person.

Marketing Is Key

Travel suppliers must now build a campaign around the benefits of meeting safely in person. This campaign needs to run in parallel with the one that is raising traveler confidence and reducing Covid anxiety. This campaign must continue well past Covid's defeat.

What might this marketing campaign look like? For starters, it must be aimed at three key stakeholders:

- 1) the travel budget owners, those mid- and senior-level executives who make the decisions about which trips get taken;
- 2) the road warriors, for whom travel is essential to their success; and
- 3) the hosts, those who need to welcome travelers into their facilities.

Make the campaign aspirational and inspirational—paint a picture of the powerful insights and emotions achieved from meetings done in person. Make it about winning, teamwork and competitive advantage. Think Gatorade and Nike commercials, and riff from there.

The business travel industry is working hard to reduce the risks of traveling. We must now also showcase our singular competitive advantage—the power and benefits of creating valuable connections. Business travel can no longer be about travel. It must now be about business and the subjective yet very real ROI that comes from meetings done in person. ■

Business Travel News (USPS 0728-870, ISSN 8750-3670) August 17, 2020 Issue 875 Vol. 37, No. 10. Business Travel News is published monthly except semi-monthly in March, April, June, August, October and November by Northstar Travel Media, LLC, 100 Lighting Way, Secaucus, NJ 07094 (201) 902-2000, and is distributed free of charge to qualified corporate travel buyers and travel agents specializing in business travel in the United States and Canada. The cost of a print subscription to non-qualified subscribers is \$129 in the U.S.; \$142 in Canada and Mexico; and \$205 in other foreign locations; the cost of a digital edition subscription is \$65; payable in advance in U.S. dollars. Registered for GST as Northstar Travel Media USA GST No. 264513185. Canadian GST #123397457. Periodicals postage paid at Newark, NJ, and additional mailing offices. Business Travel News is a trademark owned exclusively by Northstar Travel Media. Copyright © 2020 by Northstar Travel Media, LLC. Reproduction of this magazine, in whole or in part, is prohibited unless authorized by the publisher. Editorial and advertising offices: 100 Lighting Way, Secaucus, NJ 07094. For all circulation inquiries, including new subscriptions, renewals, cancellations, changes of address and problems with missed deliveries, contact customer service by mail at Business Travel News, P.O. Box 2007, Skokie, IL 60076; by phone at (800) 231-3776; fax at (847) 291-4816; e-mail at btn@omeda.com; or www.businesstravelnews.com/subscribe. POSTMASTER: Send change of address to Business Travel News, P.O. Box 2007, Skokie, IL 60076. Printed in the USA.

5TH ANNUAL BUSINESS TRAVEL trends & forecasts

MINNEAPOLIS

A VIRTUAL EVENT

September 14, 2020 • 10:00 am - 2:45 pm CT

Join top corporate decision makers focused on travel management as a complimentary guest of the BTN Group at the 5th Annual Business Travel Trends and Forecasts Minneapolis virtual conference. Explore solutions to industry challenges, share best practices, and learn from experts on subjects including:

- **The Safe Return to Travel**
- **Renegotiating Your Supplier Contracts**
- **Stakeholder Engagement**

REGISTER NOW

WWW.BUSINESSTRAVELTRENDS.COM/MINN

**USE CODE
BTN20
TO REGISTER AS OUR
COMPLIMENTARY
GUEST***

SPONSORED BY



LOEWS
HOTELS

PRESENTED BY

BTNGROUP
CONFERENCES & EVENTS

PUBLISHERS OF

BTN
BUSINESS TRAVEL NEWS

TravelProcurement

The Beat

BTN
BUSINESS TRAVEL NEWS
EUROPE