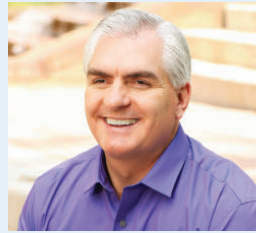


BTN

BUSINESS TRAVEL NEWS



ON THE HORIZON

BCD Travel is exploring acquisitions, according to CEO John Snyder, and is looking at tech firms and other travel management companies.

PAGE 3



TMOY 2020

Bill Amaral, travel manager for the state of California, is BTN's 2020 Travel Manager of the Year. Also: 2020's Best Practitioners.

PAGE 14



DISTRIBUTION

Southwest's Rob Brown helped the carrier secure a full-participation global distribution deal with Sabre in the waning hours of 2020.

PAGE 26

TOP STORY



What to Watch in 2021

As business travel and meetings struggle to resume in 2021, industry measures will focus on building traveler confidence. That's the word from multiple BTN editors and industry experts as they look to the year ahead. From pre-trip approval mechanisms to technology innovations along the traveler's journey, business travel will continue to require distancing, touchless interactions and the strong support of corporate policies and programs. Other trends to watch this year: supplier consolidation trends and changing travel patterns, partly due to ongoing borders restrictions but also an outgrowth of a drastically altered environment where 'work from anywhere' has precipitated both personal and corporate relocations. Finally, sustainable travel will be on the corporate agenda, and at least one industry leader thinks it's real this time—and that change will be driven by corporate client demand.

FULL STORY ON PAGE 8

LATE DEALMAKING LEAVES LITTLE TIME TO MANAGE NEW CHANGES

Brexit Business Travel Restrictions Start to Bite

BY AMON COHEN

Evidence of substantial new barriers to business travel from the U.K. to the European Union is mounting following the completion of Brexit on Dec. 31. One travel management company revealed to BTN that the British employee of a customer was denied boarding on a flight from Amsterdam to Budapest for not having a work permit—a document not required when the U.K. was part of the EU.

Meanwhile, a London-based travel manager at a global consulting firm told BTN his in-house lawyers have advised him all consulting assignments by the firm's U.K. passport holders to the EU and vice versa will require work visas in future. And an immigration specialist has warned

that companies should assume any work activity not explicitly included on the list of permitted activities for short-term business visitors published on pages 770-771 of the Dec. 24 trade and cooperation agreement (TCA) between the EU and U.K. will require additional paperwork (see list in sidebar).

The agreement includes additional unilateral restrictions (pages 768-769) on U.K. business visitors imposed by individual EU states. But the immigration expert and a lawyer both confirmed to BTN that there are also likely to be complex interpretations of the main list on a country-by-country basis, with little clarification so

CONTINUED ON PAGE 20

What's Inside

18 MANAGEMENT

- A new EC sustainability plan will change travel

19 GLOBAL

- U.S. to require negative Covid-19 test for entry

22 PROCUREMENT

- Corporate customer plans spark Delta optimism
- Sonesta to buy Red Lion Hotels for \$90M

23 TRANSPORTATION

- JetBlue, AA further partnership
- Air Canada, WestJet to cut Q1 capacity

24 PAYMENT & TECHNOLOGY

- Travelperk buys NexTravel in bid for U.S. growth
- Conferma adds automated virtual pay option

25 MEETINGS

- Hilton readies a new hybrid meeting offering

28 APP ANALYSIS

- Comparing carbon emissions tracking services

4 | On the Record



New ATPCO CEO Alex Zoghlin details his plans to continue the company's recent trajectory of transformation.

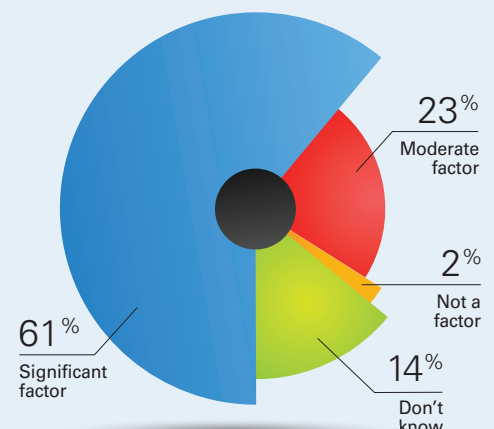
"We're going to try to simplify a lot of complexity and make it much easier to do business with us. You can connect to us via API, and we can provide you what you want."

6 | Data Hub

Buyers: Vaccines Key to Resumption

Importance of vaccine availability in corporate decisions to resume travel

Source: Global Business Travel Association Dec. 7-14 survey of 353 travel managers and procurement professionals



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Exploring Acquisitions, BCD Looks At Tech, TMCs

BY JAY BOEHMER

BCD Travel president and CEO John Snyder expects the pandemic to prompt “a fair amount of consolidation” among travel management companies, especially involving small and midsize agencies, a process in which he expects his company to play a role.

“We’ve always been very active in that space, and I don’t think anything’s going to change there,” Snyder said last month during The Beat Live virtual event.

“Without a doubt, BCD will be a player in that,” Snyder said. “We’re involved in conversations today. We’ll continue to be involved in conversations moving forward. There’s already been some deals done in this space, probably at a little richer prices than we’re willing to pay. But I think they were good acquisitions for the companies that did them—very strategic and good reasons for them to pay the price that they did.”

He didn’t specify Corporate Travel Management’s acquisition of Travel and Transport in his assessment, but that was the biggest TMC deal done in 2020.

While some TMCs may join BCD as conversations move on, Snyder said that “some of the things we’re discussing right now that are maybe more interesting are on the tech side.”

The years running up to the pandemic brought into the market a flurry of corporate travel-oriented startups, many backed by venture capital. A number of them last year have found safe harbor by way of acquisition, and a few have come under the wing of TMCs. For example, Amex GBT acquired 30SecondsToFly, and Flight Centre Travel Group picked up WhereTo.

“A lot of them are struggling right now,” Snyder said of travel-related startups, “so I think there’s a lot of opportunities for us to either partner or potentially acquire some technology that’s out there that maybe isn’t going to be able to make it through the next six to 12 months. We’re in quite a few discussions around areas like that, and we’ll probably have some announcements in the next 30 or 60 days around some of those areas.”

Snyder didn’t tip any target companies and stressed conversations could lead to “deep partnerships or some licensing agreements where we can help them fund the future,” rather than outright acquisitions.

Investment Endures

In addition to potential investment in other entities, Snyder said, “Even in the toughest times of this pandemic, we’ve really kept our investment pretty much on track. We’ve slowed a few things down, for sure, but the major initiatives, we haven’t.”

BCD continues to invest in “our people, our processes and technology to help provide the digital solutions that we need to provide,” both internally and externally to clients, he said, as the company continues a “very aggressive digital transformation,” underway for years.

Snyder called out virtual meetings as one area of investment, and a bright spot in an otherwise down-trodden business. BCD Meetings & Events in 2019



“I think there’s a lot of opportunities for us to either partner or potentially acquire some technology that’s out there that maybe isn’t going to be able to make it through the next six to 12 months.”

—BCD’S JOHN SNYDER

The Beat

acquired Chicago-based event production company L37 Creative. The timing proved fortuitous, as the firm “had a virtual meetings offering, and that has just exploded beyond belief,” said Snyder.

“We’ve had a tremendous need from across our client base for virtual meetings,” he said, calling it “one of the few areas of our company that’s actually making money and significantly ahead of their plan for the year.”

BCD has managed more than 1,500 virtual meetings and events since the start of the pandemic, “from CEO town halls to life science product releases,” he said.

Advito is another brighter spot and area of investment, as the consulting needs of clients for now have outstripped the day-to-day demands of typical trip management. Sustainability and supplier procurement that accounts for safety are among consulting-related areas of interest for BCD and clients.

As 2020 drew to a close, Snyder said client air transaction volumes remain down about 87 percent globally compared to pre-pandemic levels, though such markets as China and Japan have recovered at a healthier clip. It’s an improvement from a virtual “standstill” in transactions that greeted the pandemic.

“I would’ve thought we’d have been at a stronger pace of recovery right now,” he said. “But as we’re looking forward, we’re pretty optimistic about recovery in 2021 with the vaccines out on the market today” as well as “a lot of good things happening on the governmental side that I think are going to help open the corridors for travel, both domestically and internationally.”

He said he expects a gradual pace of recovery and a slow start to 2021, “but we’re projecting a start of ramp-up in the end of the first quarter going into the second quarter of next year.”

To fast-forward to the end of 2021, Snyder expects to “achieve somewhere around a 70 percent to 80 percent run rate by the end of next year of pre-Covid levels.”

AA to Widen Health App

BY MICHAEL B. BAKER

American Airlines this month was set to expand the availability of a mobile health passport app to cover all international travel, the carrier announced. For the past several months, American has made the VeriFly app, which lets travelers digitally store such health documentation as negative Covid-19 tests for quicker airport processing, available for travelers to select destinations. As of Jan. 23, the app was set to be available for travel from all destinations, in advance of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s newly announced policy of requiring negative tests from all passengers on inbound international flights.

“We support the implementation of a global program to require Covid-19 testing for travelers to the United States, and we want to do everything we can to make travel a seamless experience for customers,” American Airlines VP of customer experience Julie Rath said in a statement.

Destinations for which American so far has been using VeriFly include Jamaica, Chile, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. Thousands of travelers have used the app so far, and Rath said feedback has been positive.



New ATPCO CEO Zoghlin to Focus on Simplification

When Alex Zoghlin first was asked whether he was interested in taking the leadership reins at ATPCO, “I actually laughed out loud,” he said. He certainly was familiar with the decades-old organization, having worked with ATPCO as one of the founders of Orbitz and later as the founder of G2 SwitchWorks, the provider of a direct connect between airlines and third-party distributors. As he looked at what ATPCO has been up to in recent years, however, the perception changed. “It’s really amazing how transformational the company has been over the last few years,” Zoghlin said. He officially took over CEO duties at ATPCO on Jan. 1, following the retirement of president and CEO Rolf Purzer, who led that recent transformation. He spoke with BTN transportation editor Michael B. Baker about his plans to continue that trajectory. An edited transcript follows.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS THAT CHANGED YOUR PERCEPTION OF ATPCO?

One example of what ATPCO was able to accomplish just [last] year that the old ATPCO could have never done would be right when Covid hit, the company came up with a whole set of [Universal Product Attributes], descriptions around the new Covid rules—do you need masks on airplanes, does this airplane block the middle seat. They built all of those UPAs, got 300 carriers to agree, and the [global distribution systems] and major distributors to modify and accept them in a matter of weeks. If you think about how long things take in this industry, especially in creating new standards, the speed at which the company operated was nothing short of amazing.

They did the same thing again when a bunch of tickets had been purchased under one set of rules, and then they relaxed those rules for exchanges and refunds and credit vouchers. When you start changing those core rules of tariffs and fare filings, those can be measured in years very often. Again, in a matter of weeks, they got all the major GDSs and the largest carriers all to agree on relaxing all the rules even for already purchased tickets in order to enable a completely different consumer experience.

I think that the company is really well-positioned for the future in terms of how we can—as that middle man, that honest broker between distributors and suppliers and third parties—innovate, drive down friction and drive down cost and do it in a way that’s in the best interest of the entire ecosystem.

HAS THAT MADE YOU MORE AGGRESSIVE AS YOU SET UP YOUR OWN GOALS FOR ATPCO?

It has. A big part of what we’re going to do is



ATPCO’s Alex Zoghlin discusses:

- Making it easier to work with ATPCO
- Effects of the Routehappy acquisition
- ATPCO’s role in airline industry recovery

“We’re already preparing and working on ways in which we can help the industries and suppliers and GDS partners to simplify the way in which consumers can use those credits and other things and make it as seamless as possible.”

not just look at new opportunities, which we are, but I believe there’s a tremendous amount of opportunity in the products we already distribute for the industry today. The catch is that they’re really hard to work with.

When Rolf announced his retirement, I had an email from one of our GDS partners that said, “I see you’re coming on board. We’re super excited. We really want to look at how we work with you, because this file format you give us requires us to do a whole lot of work before we can make it usable in our infrastructure. We really want to simplify how we can get that done.” So, you’re going to see from ATPCO, we’re going to try to simplify a lot of complexity that we’ve built up over the years and make it much easier to do business with us. You can connect to us via API, and we can provide you what you want. We can give you implementation references on how to use it, which most modern companies do.

WHAT WILL SIMPLIFICATION MEAN FOR END USERS, LIKE CORPORATE TRAVEL BUYERS?

Expectations continue to get, especially from a technology perspective and digital-first perspective, higher and higher. Our ability to take some of our more complicated products and drive simplification for them is going to help everyone in the industry. Our travelers have expectations that those things are easy, even if the underlying technology and everything around it is very complex. We’re trying to mask that complexity.

With the Routehappy acquisition, we have a significant amount more of metadata around the flights, beyond the tariffs and baggage fees. Does this plane have Wi-Fi? What does the seat pitch look like? Can I search for just upgradable fares? There’s all these things consumers want to be able to do, but the data around them is complicated. ATPCO continues to have all that content and information, so TMCs and intermediaries and GDSs can provide new and innovative interfaces to their customers.

WHAT DO YOU SEE AS ATPCO’S ROLE IN INDUSTRY RECOVERY?

We can play a lot of roles. There are a whole lot of people, including me, that have canceled flights who now have credit. There will be a significant amount of rebooking activity going into the second half of the year. We’re already preparing and working on ways in which we can help the industries and suppliers and global distribution system partners to simplify the way in which consumers can use those credits and other things and make it as seamless as possible. We’ve had a number of airlines that have contracted their route structure, and we’ve been working on products that allow them to much more rapidly put those things back into the market. All the manual labor that typically goes into a fare filing, that’s one of the things we’re working on to help the industry when travelers are ready and when Covid-19 is better under control. We can really help get the industry back up and running. ■

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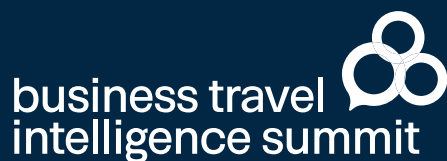
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The BTN Group looks forward to holding its 40+ events in-person and virtually this year. Be sure to visit www.BusinessTravelNews.com/Events for event updates and registration details.

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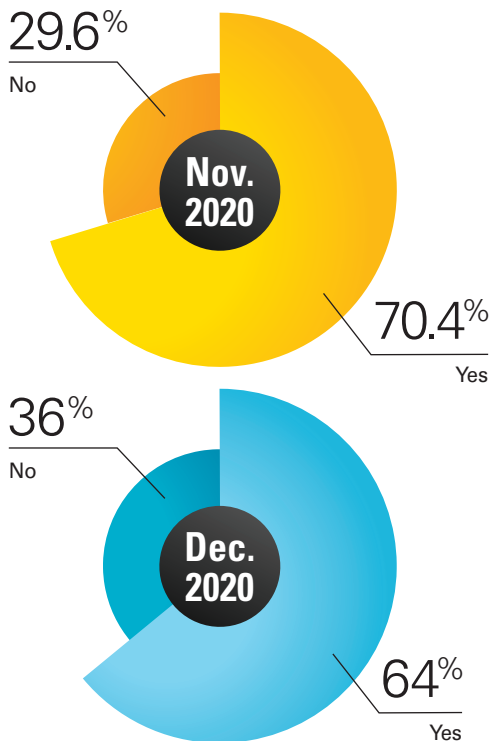
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Vaccines Not Yet Spurring Business Travel Recovery

Covid-19 vaccines are here and being administered, however sluggish and ham-handed their rollout, and most buyers say they're key to their organizations' plans to restart business travel. But rampant holiday spread in the U.S. and Europe, along with word of a new, more contagious Covid-19 variant has dimmed optimism for a quicker recovery, and statistics continue to paint a bleak business travel picture. According to one survey, fewer business travelers now are willing to take Covid-19 tests to travel than they were in November.

BUSINESS TRAVELERS' WILLINGNESS TO TEST DIPS

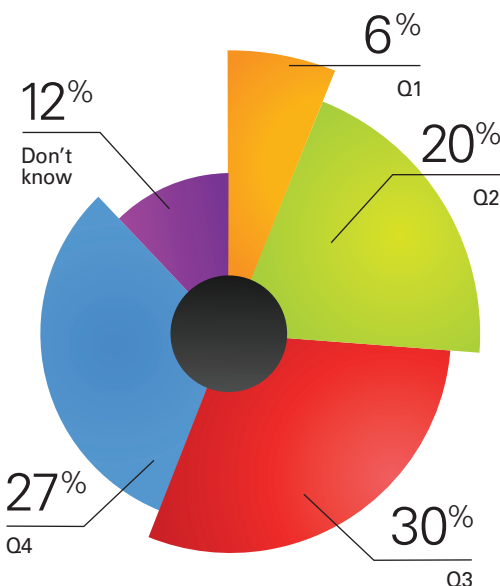
Would you be willing to take multiple Covid-19 tests before and during travel and share your results to resume traveling without restrictions?



Source: Travel Again Nov. 17-19 and Dec. 20-22 surveys each of about 136 business travelers

MOST PLANNERS LOOK PAST JUNE TO MEET

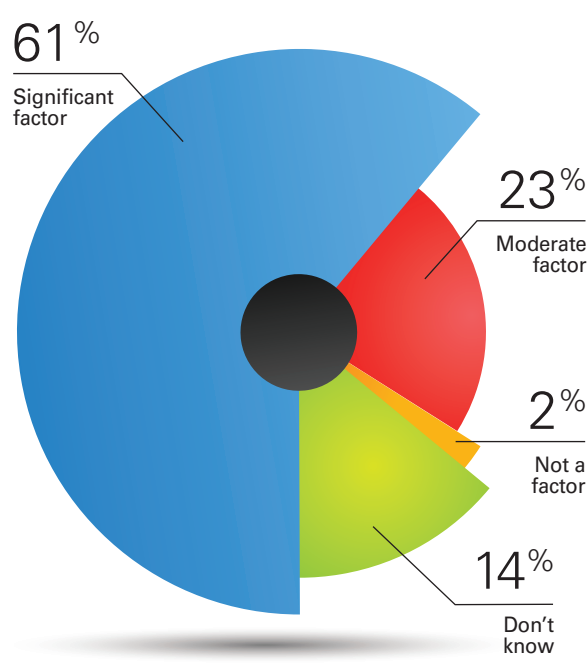
When in 2021 do you expect face-to-face meetings to return?



Source: i-Meet Dec. 13-20 survey of 259 meeting planners

BUYERS: VACCINES KEY TO RESUMPTION

Importance of vaccine availability in corporate decisions to resume travel restrictions



Source: Global Business Travel Association Dec. 7-14 survey of 353 travel managers and procurement professionals

1,753

TOTAL U.S. HOTELS CLOSED THE WEEK OF DEC. 11, THE MOST SINCE JUNE 26.

Source: Kalibri Labs

ARC: U.S. AGENCIES' AIR TICKET SALES RECOVERY STILL LIMITED

7-Day Period Ending	Agency type, YOY change		
	Corporate	Online	Leisure/Other
Dec. 20, 2020	-84.9%	-51.2%	-69.5%
Dec. 27	-77.9%	-54.9%	-69.8%
Jan. 3, 2021	-88.6%	-62.7%	-72.4%
Jan. 10	-82.8%	-51.1%	-63.0%
52-week average*	-75.36%	-56.26%	-65.91%

* Rolling average of prior 52 weeks vs. full-year 2019
Source: ARC

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WHAT

TO

WATCH

2021

- 9 Expect Digital Health Passports to Raise Equity Concerns **By Elizabeth West**
- 9 Miserable Telecommuters to Provide an Industry Lifeline **By Chris Davis**
- 10 Companies Will Leverage Pre-Trip Approval to Increase Biz Travel Flexibility **By Ralph Colunga**
- 10 Touchless Technologies Will Build Traveler Confidence **By Jay Richmond**
- 11 Amid Upped Demand for Virtual, Mainstream Payment Players Will Seek Bigger Role **By Adam Perrotta**
- 11 Airline Consolidation Likely, But Not Immediate **By Michael B. Baker**
- 12 Business Travel Coalitions Will Reclaim Service for Aviation Deserts **By Amanda Cohen**
- 12 Top Business Travel Markets Will Reshuffle in 2021 **By Dawit Habtemariam**
- 13 Corporate Travel Management Will Push Hotels to Prioritize Sustainability **By Tobias Ragge**
- 13 Extended Stay Is Here to Stay **By Donna M. Airoidi**



Expect Digital Health Passports to Raise Equity Concerns

By **BTN Group Editorial Director Elizabeth West**

At the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, BTN held a number of buyer-only forums that provided participants with a platform for dialogue unperturbed by commercial participation. We talked about where to go from “here”—after the repatriations, after the travel hiatus. Perhaps none of the participants thought we would be in the same Covid-19 limbo nearly 10 months hence. What those buyers did foretell, however, was that health passports would be the path to travel’s return.

They were right. But it won’t be easy, and there will be equity issues.

CommonPass, The Mayo Clinic, Microsoft and Oracle among other participants have joined together as the Vaccine Coalition Initiative. The objective of the initiative is to provide a digital health passport that not only could be used for travel but also might be used as a “free pass” to participate in any group-oriented activities. For our industry, think meetings and conferences or even the office. Recreationally, think concerts, sporting events, maybe even shopping centers.

The travel industry already has a form of health certification. Immunization against infectious diseases like yellow fever or malaria is required to travel to certain global markets. Graduating from that kind of certification to a broader digital health pass that is less vulnerable to fraud than a paper certificate sounds like an advance. And it is, particularly in the face of a pandemic.

But there are also some negatives.

Limited immunization that is required for voluntary travel to certain locations is quite different from being required to present proof of immunization to board any plane or enter any meeting or conference. The result of such a system would bifurcate access to these activities not only to the “will” and “will nots” in some cases but also to the “haves” and “have nots.”

Both are important issues. It’s arguable that the “will nots” should not have access blocked because they can’t or won’t be immunized. There are models for these issues. For example, school systems provide immunization exceptions for school-age children who are not vaccinated for flu, chicken pox, measles and other infectious diseases. As larger numbers of the population opt out, however, it does endanger herd immunity.

The “have nots” are another issue. Vaccine rollouts will not be standard around the world. Medical experts have discussed this issue at length with BTN over the past 10 months. First, there are money issues—rich countries have gotten access to the vaccines much faster than poorer nations. Second, there are distribution issues and the formulations of the mRNA vaccines have all but guaranteed that warmer, less developed nations cannot support versions of the vaccine that require super-subzero refrigeration.

Financial and distribution issues will require poorer countries to use different vaccines than richer countries. This issue will likely precipitate debate over which vaccines meet government standards, and those will differ among nations. Assuming digital health passports are broadly rolled out—and I believe they will be—differences in which vaccine versions countries will accept on these platforms will imbed broad inequities in where global business travelers will be allowed to travel and which ones may not be able to travel at all.



Miserable Telecommuters to Provide an Industry Lifeline

By **BTN Managing Editor Chris Davis**

Human resources directors the world over face quite the challenge in preparing their workforces for a return to their offices, whatever that may look like. Employee opinions on the safety, wisdom and necessity of leaving their homes to go back to work cross the spectrum, with some horrified at the notion, some eager, and others at every point in between. Productivity hasn’t taken much of a hit in most cases, but an increasing number of workers cite declining

levels of happiness and mental health. And while some people love working from home, surveys show significant numbers are discouraged or even feel trapped by the Zoom calls at their kitchen tables, desperate for a chat with co-workers at the water cooler.

It’s that latter group that, in their misery, could offer suppliers a glimmer of hope that business travel could return at a faster rate than the slow, staggered return to the office many HR execs are planning. For this group, according to a recent study by market research firm Martec, appears to be disproportionately populated by the professional, white-collar experienced workers who most frequently travel for business.

Martec classified only about 16 percent of respondents in a survey of 1,214 U.S. workers it released in November as “thriving,” those who love working from home and don’t miss the interaction of an office environment. This group is disproportionately female, according to Martec, and more importantly, disproportionately entry-level. On the flip side, 32 percent of respondents, disproportionately younger, consider themselves “trapped” in a work-from-home environment, and another 27 percent consider themselves “discouraged” and miss the social aspects of a typical work environment. These groups include proportionate levels of men and women, but they skew somewhat younger and they also skew professional, white-collar and managerial.

Why does this matter? However the pandemic progresses from here, and predicting that seems a fool’s errand, it seems clear that most businesses will not mandate employee returns to office spaces en masse. A September Conference Board study showed that only a quarter of the 330 human resources executives surveyed expect more than 90 percent of their employees to work from their offices a full year after Covid subsides. In contrast, 34 percent of respondents project that, even a full year after the pandemic subsides, more than 40 percent of their companies’ employees still will be working from home.

While some workers, then as now, will be required to physically be in workplaces due to their positions or responsibilities, employee preference otherwise will play a role in return-to-work strategy, especially if companies want to limit in-office capacity. As such, it seems quite likely that the people who hate working from home the most will be the most likely to volunteer to return to the office, and they’re the people who—generally speaking—are most likely to have business travel as part of their responsibilities.

A world in which the most likely workers to stay at home post-pandemic are entry-level, non-managerial employees is not a discouraging one for travel suppliers. It’s why, even when offices remain less than fully populated, suppliers might find the most eager to get back to in-person work might be their lifeline to get back to travel too.

Companies Will Leverage Pre-Trip Approval to Increase Business Travel Flexibility

By SAP Concur Travel & Expense Technology Solutions Thought Leader Ralph Colunga



More companies will implement pre-trip approvals for business travel in 2021, as part of broader efforts to safeguard employees and reshape travel and expense policies. At the booking stage, a pre-trip approval process assesses whether a trip is necessary; during the trip, the prior authorization helps a company keep tabs on employee

whereabouts for duty of care; post-trip, the additional visibility can help if contact-tracing is required. But pre-trip approval could be positioned to do more.

While most organizations will keep bookings in preferred channels—that is, within an online booking tool or travel management company partner—some may consider a booking tool-agnostic pre-trip process that positions the program to provide more flexibility to travelers in a time when flexibility will be an immensely important factor in rebuilding confidence with business travelers.

Even though there is reason for optimism with regards to Covid-19, uncertainty remains. Governments will adjust rules and restrictions to current and projected situations. Travel suppliers and airports will institute new requirements. Travelers will need to respond to those adjustments in turn, which could require last-minute changes to plans. Elevated health and safety concerns only add to the stress, and empowered employees with better options to make travel decisions based on their own and their company's best interest will have more confidence on the road.

A pre-trip approval process that allows for supplier-direct bookings does not diminish the role of travel management companies, which provide essential support to travelers and program managers. However, a percentage of business travelers always will book directly with suppliers no matter how strict the corporate policy. When we think about the next generation of business travelers, many prefer the self-service approach to booking for convenience, time savings and value.

In addition, many suppliers reward travelers who book direct by offering special incentives like lower rates, preferential treatment, seating, and special amenities. Elevated health and safety concerns may further increase the number of travelers who will want a more personalized say in their plans.

Business travel managers who institute pre-trip approvals in 2021 should consider technologies that can provide the transparency necessary for program compliance, while also accommodating more flexibility for business travelers. Providing fewer constraints will help rebuild confidence with business travelers and boost satisfaction with travel programs as our industry continues to mitigate the effects of Covid-19.

Touchless Tech Will Build Traveler Confidence

By Amadeus Head of Customer Solutions, Americas, Jay Richmond

When I think back to traveling for business at this time last year, hand sanitizer, personal space and the option of video calls versus a plane ride might have been on my list of nice-to-haves. A year later they are at the top of everyone's must-have list.

I look forward to my first trip to see a customer in 2021. When it happens, I want to be assured every touch point of my trip prioritizes my health and safety and that of my fellow travelers.

Amadeus is among the few companies in the world at the intersection of travel and technology across airlines, airports, hospitality, payments, travel sellers and others in the travel ecosystem. As we worked with customers through crisis mitigation, it became clear that technology would be at the core of recovery, particularly business travel recovery, because business travelers have historically shown higher adoption of new travel technologies compared to leisure travelers.

Our global survey proved this once again: More than four of five travelers said technology would increase their confidence to travel in the next 12 months and business travelers were the most likely traveler type to be reassured by technology. U.S. travelers, specifically, wanted technology to reduce lines and congestion, protect financial and personal data, and minimize face-to-face or physical contact.



Enter Touchless Technologies

Touchless technologies will answer that call in 2021. They will digitize the passenger journey with biometric screening, digital payments and mobile applications.

While the check-in process has been evolving over the years with remote check-in and mobile boarding passes, travelers are likely to experience an evolution of the boarding process in 2021, with biometric screening at more gates and with more airlines. U.S. business travelers, in particular, expressed the most interest in facial recognition technology to increase their confidence to travel in the next year.

While we've all been grounded, we've become more accustomed to digital and alternate forms of payment. As we return to travel, paying with non-cash or non-swipe methods will be preferred everywhere to eliminate the need to exchange cash or input PIN numbers.

Having easy access to information about the safety of destinations, including local outbreaks, guidelines and restrictions, is essential to me as a business traveler. I'm not alone. In Amadeus' survey, access to full information is the experience that most respondents selected where technology can address concerns and encourage travel. Both business travelers and travel advisors must have this information at their fingertips at all stages of a trip.

When global travel halted last year, technology enabled many Amadeus customers to make quick adjustments for drastic demand changes. As sights shifted to recovery and how to rethink travel for the future, these same customers accelerated implementation of new technologies and pushed better adoption of existing ones. The industry will see more of this in 2021—and it will be key to business traveler confidence and satisfaction.

Amid Upped Demand for Virtual, Mainstream Payment Players Will Seek Bigger Role

By **BTN Payment & Technology Editor Adam Perrotta**



Increased hygiene and safety concerns amid the Covid-19 pandemic have sparked a surge in demand for contactless payments, according to numerous recent polls. That large-scale shift in sentiment finally could break the stalemate that long has hindered contactless adoption: merchants unwilling to accept a payment method seldom used by consumers, and consumers apathetic about a payment tool not accepted by most merchants. Meanwhile, in the context of corporate payments, contactless increasingly means virtual, given the advantages virtual payment cards offer organizations, including enhanced security, finer spending controls and more complete cost data—all of which have become even more important post-Covid.

Taken together, those factors—increased ubiquity of contactless payments at large, and the compelling case for virtual corporate cards—have created a ripe opportunity for payment providers. And while specialists such as Conferma Pay and GraspPay previously had led the way in fulfilling demand for virtual corporate payments, established card issuers and other mainstream payment players are taking note—and taking a more active role in creating new virtual payment offerings for corporate use.

U.S. Bank has been prominent among established issuers pushing virtual corporate payments, last fall launching a corporate-focused virtual card dubbed Instant Card. Notably, the bank has sought to reach corporate users through integrations with expense management providers, including Concur Expense and TravelBank, a model that offers the added advantage of charges made with the card flowing directly into those platforms.

For U.S. Bank, both partnerships offer access to a previously untapped

audience. In the case of Concur, which serves mostly large corporations with existing card programs, U.S. Bank-issued virtual cards can be issued via the Concur mobile app for niche spending by contractors, job candidates and employees who don't have a permanent corporate card. Meanwhile, the other integration gives the bank access to TravelBank's client base of smaller companies, many of which don't have a traditional corporate card program.

Other major corporate issuers emphasizing virtual payments include Bank of America—which has reported strong adoption over the past year for its corporate-focused Virtual Travel Card—and issuer/network American Express, which recently integrated its virtual cards into Coupa Pay's B2B purchasing platform.

Payment networks have gotten into the game too. In November, Visa partnered with Conferma to launch a suite of corporate virtual payments services, including a platform that delivers Visa virtual cards to mobile devices. Earlier in the year, the two companies allied on an initiative to ramp up virtual card issuance by banks. And Mastercard in December announced a new service, launched in partnership with digital card platform Extend, to enable virtual corporate cards to be delivered to mobile devices for one-time purchases or longer-term use.

It may have taken a pandemic to accomplish, but user demand and merchant acceptance have finally caught up to the business case for virtual corporate cards. And with the market likely to further heat up as business travel resumes in the months ahead, expect more established payment providers to look to get in on the action.



Airline Consolidation Likely, But Not Immediate

By **BTN Senior Editor Michael B. Baker**

There have been predictions of widespread airline consolidation since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, but don't expect 2021 to be the year that happens.

As a best-case scenario, airlines this year are facing a low-demand first half followed by a potentially swift recovery at least of leisure business in the second half, dependent on an effective vaccine rollout. Airlines' recovery of their corporate business likely faces a longer timeline.

"We have little hope for a rebound in corporate travel in 2021 but could see international markets begin opening in late 2021 as testing protocols [and] vaccines are adopted," Cowen and Co. analyst Helene Becker wrote in a recent research note. Business travel air volumes likely will remain down at least 85 percent at least throughout the summer, she said, using 2019 volumes as a comparison.

As such, speculation already is rising about major industry consolidation, as airlines will have limited revenues to pay off costs and increasing debts. Reuters global deals editor Lauren Silva Laughlin in a recent piece predicted that the U.S. Big Four would become the Big Three, with American Airlines—facing a debt six times as high as its projected 2022 earnings—a likely candidate for consolidation.

Globally, there already has been some major consolidation moves, most notably Korean Air's announcement in November that it had reached a deal to acquire and consolidate with rival Asiana Airlines, and the International Air Transport Association said more consolidation is likely, at least for airlines within the same country. News reports have indicated that the Japanese government, as it prepares financial support for its largest airlines, Japan Airlines and All Nippon Airways, could push for a merger there as well.

Consolidation will not be a fast-moving process, however. Palatable deals can be more difficult to reach when both parties are in their worst possible financial positions, particularly when the recovery timeline remains unclear. The increased stake some governments have taken in airlines as a result of stimulus packages make deals murkier.

There's also the regulatory aspect. In the United States, for example, President Joe Biden has not yet said a lot specific to the airline industry, though the Democratic administrations typically have been a bit more wary of competition implications of mergers than their Republican counterparts. They will be more amenable if they can make the case that a merger is an existential necessity, as Korean and Asiana are doing, but even so, it will not be a quick process.

As such, expect to see more cooperation to emerge this year—in the vein of American's new partnerships with Alaska Airlines and JetBlue last year—but larger merger activity probably remains a bit further down the road, depending on how the recovery pans out for airlines.

Over the course of the next several years, however, it's become clear there will be fewer players left in the game, one way or another.

"Covid-19 is not going to go away in 2021," CAPA founder and chairman emeritus Peter Harbison said at a CAPA Live summit late last year. "It's not going to be solved quickly by a vaccine. Many airlines themselves have shrunk already and will stay smaller. There'll be ongoing financial losses. Airline consolidation is inevitable, including airline departures and restructuring."

The Fate of Aviation Deserts in 2021

By XO Head of Marketing Amanda Cohen

The economic pain and threatened futures of many small cities is a reality that existed prior to the pandemic. These areas suffered population declines and blows to their manufacturing base, driven by shifts to China and the other countries in the Far East, long before Covid-19. The Conversation noted grimly in 2019, “Small and medium-sized urban areas—and the rural counties that are linked to them—are left with transportation, public works, housing and commercial bases that they struggle to maintain. Inevitably, blight ensues.”

Cuts from the pandemic, despite the CARES program, are adding to the ongoing burden of pain. In June, more than 75 cities were impacted by full or partial cutbacks from the major carriers. Since, a few have been added back, such as Stillwater, Okla., where American Airlines announced the city’s lifeline would be not severed in September. An activated local community that rallied together to pressure federal and state officials, and the airline itself, made the difference.

Not every abandoned city has been as fortunate. American recently announced that cuts to New Haven, Conn., Stewart Airport North of New York City, and Williamsport Regional Airport in central Pennsylvania will be permanent. You know the cuts are broad when they impact the home of both Yale University and the Little League World Series.

There are a few bright spots. For example, Southwest is adding flights to cities including Santa Barbara and Palm Springs—but as USA Today noted, they are designed to appeal to pandemic vacationers, not the business travel that these smaller cities rely on.

There are a few bright spots. For example, Southwest is adding flights to cities including Santa Barbara and Palm Springs—but as USA Today noted, they are designed to appeal to pandemic vacationers, not the business travel that these smaller cities rely on.

Not Coming Back Fast

Commercial airlines will continue to be under financial pressure for a long time, and the macro forces that were hollow-

ing out small and midsize towns prior to Covid-19 will continue. Private aviation, with its ability to bring key business leaders to and from anywhere in America, will play a role in keeping these cities connected to the world. But these smaller cities will require both private and commercial flights to keep them competitive in the national economy.

Inspired and creative local leadership will be critical, and the good news is it’s already happening. Stillwater is a good example. Plus, a surprising number of big companies are still headquartered in small towns, including Hormel (Austin, Minn.); Dick’s Sporting Goods (Binghamton, N.Y.) and CVS (Woonsocket, R.I.). These companies have deep local roots, and their leadership has a strong commitment the community—valuing the work/life balance that smaller cities enable.

But innovation is needed to keep these cities connected to the national aviation experience, and we predict developments like these in 2021 and beyond to keep them vital:

- **Mayors will become more active:** Roswell, N.M., was on chopping block for commercial service, but Mayor Dennis Kintigh negotiated a financial agreement to keep some reduced service.
- **Tax breaks and other incentives:** Reduced landing fees and other incentives will be offered to entice commercial airlines to add smaller markets back to their route maps. Funding from local businesses along with state and city funding will be used for this purpose, which is essentially no different than Industrial Revenue Bonds and other financial instruments used to attract businesses.
- **Subscription model pricing:** Local companies will join together and purchase annual flight subscriptions to guarantee a set level of volume to airlines, making it economically viable to open these smaller cities. If 15 companies in New Haven or Dubuque join together to buy sufficient number of air miles, that predictability would change the game.
- **Leveraging social media:** Until now, cities have acted largely individually to exert pressure on the airlines: the Stillwater example. But imagine if 75 cities, all injured or abandoned by cutbacks, worked together to make their voices heard.

Lastly, small cities will have a friend in Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, the former mayor of South Bend, Ind. population 101,000. And perhaps in a president from Scranton, Penn., current population 76,289—down from 143,400 in 1930. What more needs to be said about why small cities need to thrive?



Top Business Travel Markets Will Reshuffle in 2021

By BTN Associate Editor Dawit Habtemariam



This year, Orlando, Fla., will be hosting the Global Business Travel Association’s annual convention. As business travel slowly rebounds, expect populated cities in more “open” states like Texas and Florida to bounce back before the historically most popular business travel destinations like New York City.

First, the pandemic restrictions won’t be that much different, especially in the first half of 2021. There is a new contagious Covid-19 strain in the U.S., and the World Health Organization said 2021 “could be even tougher.” At the moment, it’s unclear how long the vaccine guarantees immunity, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. The CDC also recommends vaccinated individuals continue to social distance, to wear masks and to stay away from crowds. Just like in 2020, states are likely to implement their own approaches to responding to Covid-19 in 2021; the Biden administration has said it does not support a national lockdown.

Second, just like in 2020, the people most likely to travel amid the pandemic will be sales representatives because their incomes often depend on building relationships with new clients. Many likely want to get back in front of clients as soon as possible because virtual conferences aren’t cutting it for many of them. Meetings and conventions have already been held in less restricted states. In November, Meeting Professionals International held a 608-person conference at the Gaylord Texas Resort and Convention Center.

Third, sales representatives will travel to where their customers are. Their customers’ employees are moving from locked down areas to more open areas. In 2020, New York had the second-highest percentage of outbound migration, with 67 percent being outbound (72 percent New York City’s total migration was outbound), according to United Van Lines’ 44th Annual National Migration Study. Bloomberg, in its own analysis of United Van Lines’ data, reported nearly half of New Yorker relocations were to cities in Florida, Texas, California and North Carolina.

Alphabet, Amazon, Facebook and Apple—all Corporate Travel 100 spenders—have expanded or plan to expand their operations in Austin, Texas, as has Tesla. Even if some of them were planned before 2020, these plans are moving forward despite the pandemic, signaling confidence in the area as a place to conduct business. 2021 will look a lot like 2020, but the cities where people plan to travel for business may already be very different.



Corporate Travel Management Will Push Hotels to Prioritize Sustainability

By HRS CEO Tobias Ragge

At a time of so much change in so many processes, there is undeniable momentum on the integration of sustainable practices and partners in travel management. While this trend is not necessarily new for 2021, the presence and importance of this element—particularly in air and hotel procurement—has rapidly climbed the priority list of Fortune 500 companies.

This trend cuts across every vertical market. As we've engaged in pandemic-driven, revamped hotel program management exercises on multiple continents over the past year, it's now clear that sustainability ranks among the top three priorities, including traveler safety and cost issues. What's more, the effort to work with partners driving sustainable processes comes from all corporate corners, not merely procurement, finance or human resources.

According to the Global Sustainable Investment Alliance, companies around the world made \$31 trillion in sustainable investments by the beginning of 2019. A BCG Consulting study that same year looked at the valuations of companies in three important industries—chemicals, energy, and mining—and cross-referenced carbon emissions, and found businesses with lower carbon emissions had valuations as much as 13 percent higher than companies reporting higher emissions (all else being equal). As always, data drives change, and these metrics are impacting executive decision making.

Most companies reset their travel programs in 2020, and many went beyond revamping traveler safety and ROI measurement to include sustainability reporting and clearly defined targets. The C-suite and executive boards now have pointed expectations when it comes to collaborating with suppliers that have sustainable approaches to everyday business practices.

Moreover, these expectations are more frequently impacting travel procurement and the typical business traveler experience. Buyers are asking how technology providers, suppliers and other entities can contribute to reducing carbon emissions even as business travel begins to re-emerge.

Suppliers Will Reprioritize to Capture Margin

HRS sees hotel groups big and small adjusting to this reality. Obviously, the dramatic revenue losses incurred in 2020 has likely stunted investments in sustainable practices. From our vantage point, as hotels of any size start to recover, investment in these activities should move to the top of the list for 2021. The simple reason why: Higher-margin corporate accounts will want details on what they do, how they do it, and how it can be measured and thereby align with a corporation's specifically defined carbon emission management strategy.

Beyond procurement, a hotel's performance on the sustainability front will increasingly appear in the booking paths of online tools used by travelers and executive admins. Hotels already have a good start here, with many having taken steps to highlight their new hygiene protocols in the wake of the pandemic. They will need to continue focusing on this display element, making it easier for shoppers to identify hotels that meet corporate and personal preferences.

Sustainability is one of the mega-trends for this decade. As business travel re-emerges in 2021, our need as a community to engage on sustainability issues represents both a challenge to address and an opportunity to seize.



Extended Stay Is Here to Stay

By BTN Lodging & Meetings Senior Editor Donna M. Airoidi

Last year, extended-stay brands, particularly the economy and midscale segments, saw less dramatic declines in revenue per available room and occupancy than most traditional hotel brands. That trend will continue in 2021, even as vaccines are more widely distributed and more business travelers return to the road.

Several surveys and reports—as well as anecdotal conversations with travel managers and experts—suggest more guests will want rooms with kitchens so they can control their food supply (and a lot of traditional hotels still have not fully reopened their restaurants). They will want more space for social distancing and for working from their rooms. And they will want less interaction with staff, from check-in to housecleaning to check-out. Extended-stay properties provide that.

Companies also will be more cost-conscious when it comes to travel—not that they weren't before the pandemic, but price will be an even bigger concern, especially after seeing how productive employees could be working from home and conducting virtual meetings.

Further, there will be increased demand for longer stays from business travelers, at least for this year and possibly into 2022. Many of the current extended-stay guests are from the health care, construction and supply chain and logistics verticals, booking weekly or monthly stays, and that mix likely will continue this year. The average length of stay for guests staying seven nights or longer had increased year-to-date through September 2020 for both extended-stay and traditional hotels, according to a report from The Highland Group and Kalibri Labs. Traditional hotels saw the ALOS go from 12.8 to 15 nights, while extended-stay hotels saw an increase from 22.8 to 24.7 nights.

Deciding if a trip is necessary won't be taken lightly, and when it is approved, the traveler won't be hopping in for a day then hopping out. They'll need to make the most of their travel commitment, and that could mean seeing more customers over several days and allotting more time between meetings, or getting internal teams together for longer periods to rebuild those relationships and take advantage of time together to brainstorm after being separated for most of 2020.

I can hear the apartment-style lodging suppliers like Airbnb for Work, Sonder, Mint House and myriad others saying that what an extended-stay property offers is exactly what they provide, only with even fewer touchpoints and better amenities. That may be true—and extended-stay guests may have helped some of those companies during the pandemic. But there also is the risk of the unknown with those options. Who is the owner or manager? Do they have any control over the regular residents in their buildings when it comes to mask wearing or social distancing? Will they remain in business? The pandemic already has felled Stay Alfred, Lyric and a few others. BTN also found in a recent survey that while 6 percent of travel buyers consider Airbnb and alternative accommodations more important than before the pandemic, 10 percent said they were less important. That's a net loss. Still, they have their appeal, and perhaps 2022 will be the year these lodging options gain more of a foothold in corporate programs.

In the meantime, major hotel companies will keep their eye on extended stay. In 2020, Extended Stay America added seven properties in November, Red Lion Hotels transitioned its GuestHouse International brand to extended stay in October, new company StayAPT Suites launched last January and opened its first property in October, and Choice Hotels launched a midscale extended-stay brand, Everhome Suites, last January.

Don't anticipate any new extended-stay brand launches in 2021, but new-build deals signed this year could favor extended-stay properties.



2020 Travel Manager of the Year



BTN's 2020 TRAVEL MANAGER OF THE YEAR

Amid Crises, California's Bill Amaral Steps In

By Elizabeth West

The complexities associated with managing travel for the state of California are immense. Business partnership and travel manager Bill Amaral has navigated those complexities for seven years, implementing new payment and employee reimbursement processes across 270 state agencies and getting a travel booking channel mandate from the governor to drive compliance.

Cut to 2020: The state needed emergency lodging to house healthcare workers and the homeless during the Covid-19 crisis. Amaral took the reins, creating what was originally budgeted to be a \$40 million program supported by the Federal Emergency Management Administration. As the pandemic escalated and required lodging for parolees and harvest workers, and then wildfires compounded the crisis with a need for family relocations, Amaral stepped up again. He expanded the program that now has surpassed \$160 million in lodging spend, representing more than a million room nights in the state.

Yet the state of California doesn't have a managed hotel program. Establishing such a program has been on Amaral's drawing board for several years. Instead, the state has relied on courtesy rates extended by hotels to government business travelers.

The Covid-19 crisis called for more control. "The original purpose of the program was to keep healthcare workers safe and allow them to self-isolate from their families to make sure they weren't exposing anyone to infection," said Amaral. The program also needed to support healthcare worker mobility, allowing California to house medical staff traveling to Covid-19 hotspots from other counties or even other states. Providing shelter for the homeless individuals exposed to Covid-19 was also a priority to prevent spread among that vulnerable population—the same was true for parolees leaving jail during quarantine and harvest workers who tended to move around the state and could take infection with them.

To meet the need, Amaral knew California needed a formal program, and fast. "I had gotten the assignment to look for 18,000 to 22,000 room nights in 21 counties. We didn't have the resources to source something like that. It had to be done immediately and the pandemic was expanding," said Amaral. He reached out to hotel solutions provider HRS for help. "I had not worked with them before but was familiar with HRS through the Global Business Travel Association, BTN and other industry events," he said.

Within days he had a proposal that he "pushed up the food chain" and the path was set. HRS would conduct a flash sourcing exercise, load rates and integrate content to the CalTravelStore agency booking tool, integrate payment and deliver streamlined reporting.

What the team didn't know as they embarked, however, was that Covid-19 would not be so easily contained. What started as an order for 22,000 room nights in fewer than half of California's counties exploded to a need for 434,000 room nights across all 58 counties within weeks. It has since expanded to more than a million room nights, while the December infection surge in California indicates a long haul for the program even with the help of vaccines to reduce spread.

"We initially were looking at a smaller footprint," said HRS director



BTN 2020 BEST PRACTITIONER

Dell's Shannon Blando

Like most companies, Dell's business travel came to a screeching halt in March when the World Health Organization declared Covid-19 a pandemic. But there were some functions within the company that didn't have the luxury of sheltering in place—namely, technicians. Those men and women were essential to keeping the rest of us Dell users working for our own companies, making sure we had the hardware to connect with the world even as we isolated and stopped going into our offices.

Global category manager Shannon Blando needed to keep her technicians moving and keep them safe. Like many travel managers, she also saw a dramatic upheaval that required a programmatic response.

"I work in procurement, so I watch the markets every day," Blando said. Not only were hotel rates starting to plummet, she said, hotel closures were creating an environment in which her travelers might book a room night that ostensibly no longer existed.

Blando could have turned to her travel management partner to research the bookings manually—TMCs have commented all year about increased booking complexity and manual interventions they are handling to ensure such issues are mitigated for their clients.

"We needed an automated solution," she said. "I knew Tripbam would be able to move quickly, whereas TMCs aren't always as nimble with technology." Plus, she said, Tripbam had the continuously updated local market data that could provide insights after the booking. Blando asked Tripbam to bring hotel closure data forward by adding a duty-of-care tab on the company's Hotel Intelligence dashboard. This change provided all Tripbam clients with real-time visibility into reservations made at subsequently closed hotels that needed to be rebooked.

Indeed, Blando has blazed other trails for her hotel program that should provide new opportunities for others. She has moved Dell's entire program to dynamic pricing and negotiated a percentage off local best available rates with all hotel partners. She also worked with one supplier to iron out a method to keep corporate sales in the loop as she added new properties to her program without needing to go through her national account manager to get a deal. This has resolved a major, longstanding procurement headache that is typically outside of industry standard.

According to one of Dell's supplier partners familiar with her strategies, Blando tends to target the most immovable suppliers for innovation to prove the industry can change, not just a particular relationship.

Yet, she's not all about the buyer. Blando is looking beyond the acute challenges of Covid-19 to position her program and her partnerships for recovery in 2021. She already has seen it happening. "We have many fewer rebookings due to hotel closures now," she said. "I'm seeing the market open back up and we want to be a valued partner as the industry regains its footing."

—Elizabeth West



BTN 2020 BEST PRACTITIONER

BCG's Gehan Colliander

Global management consultancy Boston Consulting Group has pledged to cut its business travel-related carbon emissions at least 30 percent per full-time employee by the year 2025 from 2018 levels. The target is part of a commitment BCG announced in September 2020 to reach net-zero climate impact for the business by 2030 through carbon-reduction initiatives while investing in carbon-removal projects for the footprint that remains. Slashing business travel emissions is central to BCG's sustainability strategy, but it is a daunting challenge because travel accounts for more than 80 percent of the company's total carbon footprint.

Head of global travel Gehan Colliander is central to achieving that goal—not because she is a sustainability expert but because she is a travel data expert and knows the nuances and data points required to understand travel complexities and travel volumes. Origin, destination, aircraft type, fare class—all these affect the carbon footprint of a business trip. Car, rail and hotel stays, as well, produce substantial emissions that must be mitigated to achieve BCG's carbon goals. And BCG wants to look at all this data in different ways, said Colliander, by supplier, by traveler, by business unit, to understand how to focus its efforts.

"Travel is complicated," acknowledged managing director and partner for global operations services Kathryn Bell, who is responsible for BCG's travel and sustainability as well as procurement, security and facilities. "One has to understand deeply the way the travel supply chain operates and the nuance of the data. The sophistication of analysis that was required to ensure the sustainability team really understood how travel emissions relate to travel data was a very important role for Gehan and her team."

"We are moving into an environment in which we have to make our carbon emissions meaningful," said Colliander. The travel manager's role, she said, is to collaborate with the sustainability team and provide the information required to set strategy and measure the impact of the levers being pulled to drive that strategy.

But Colliander knows there are two sides to the carbon emissions story. It's not just about measuring what is happening in the business, it's also about influencing traveler choices—first, whether to travel and, if travel is necessary, how to limit the carbon emitted by the trip.

To that end, she has partnered with booking tool provider KDS to deliver carbon emission information at the point of sale. "When travelers book their trips, they are provided with emissions information based on the same conversion factor that the BCG sustainability team uses to calculate the firm's overall carbon footprint," said Colliander. Aligning that information has provided consistency across BCG's carbon reduction strategy and has armed travelers with insights to make the right decisions for the business and the environment.

—Elizabeth West

of sourcing for the Americas Lexi Benakis. "We stood up the RFP and got everything into the tool. As we were going through the process, it expanded. We sourced about 2,000 properties in a week's time."

At first, the team was concerned. "The response rate wasn't as high as we had hoped in the first day or two," said Benakis. HRS got more creative with its outreach, going direct to hotels and to hotel management companies with the RFP. With layoffs and furloughs in the hospitality industry, much has been made during the Covid-19 crisis of the potential that hotels simply won't be able to respond to RFP requests. For this project, at least, that theory didn't prove out. HRS tracked an 85 percent response rate. "In the end, the 2,000 hotels were excited to have the business and they really worked with us through an intense process to make it happen," said Benakis.

And it wasn't the case that California accepted whatever bids came through. Location—often around hospitals and medical centers—was a critical component as was hotel health and safety protocols and a realistic minimum expectation for available amenities and services.

"[We looked at] cleaning routines and new protocols, contactless housekeeping, contactless food delivery. We looked at whether linen refresh could be contactless, elevator cleanliness, and how HVAC systems were configured. Were they shared throughout the entire hotel or controlled in each room? We went through a lot of containment questions. We also asked about virtual payment, or contactless check-in," said Benakis. Confirming the virtual payment capability was a critical element for California.

As the scope of the program expanded, sourcing exercises grew in turn, with HRS loading rates and incorporating new hotels on a rolling basis. "Within two weeks we had the first round of properties loaded and bookable," said Benakis. It helped that the hotel solutions company had asked willing hotels to give their best and final offers in the first bid. With cratering demand throughout the hotel industry, market dynamics clearly favored the buyer.

"The state told me to get the best deal," said Amaral, who fully leans into the responsibility of squeezing all the value from taxpayer dollars. On the other hand, the deal had to be fair. "Our goal wasn't to go out and say drop this to nothing," said Benakis. Benchmarked against the pre-Covid-19 market, hotel rates were down 40 percent for this sourcing exercise, giving California the ability to house that many more healthcare workers, aid the homeless and others and help prevent infection.

Responsibility Is a Two-Way Street

While HRS took the lead on the sourcing exercise, Amaral worked on the program parameters and implementing with CalTravelStore, the state's agency of record. Anyone reaching out for housing had to qualify to participate. That meant pulling agents back from leave and training them quickly, since self-booking was not a part of the program.

"We reallocated staff to vet the guests, based on how they answered the questions from the agent script," said Amaral. For example, they had to be working in a location where there were Covid-positive patients. Once they were booked, Amaral made sure all guests were educated about their end of the bargain: All participants had to follow the rules to prevent infection as well.

"We took some of [the hotel safety protocol] and converted it into a guidance document for the guests," he said. "We outlined what type of contact the guests could have with the hotel staff—no additional guests were allowed—and down to that level of detail. We have a responsibility to do everything we can to keep all parties safe, including the staff of our hotel partners, so all these elements were important."

As for auditing the hotel, Amaral is relying on the guests for feedback. "We are sending them surveys throughout their stay—upon check-in, at the midpoint, and on check-out—to ensure the hotel is doing its part," said Amaral.

With all the new—and previously unvetted—program participants, auditing payment and spend information was also critical to reduce risk for the state of California.

“We audit every single folio,” said Amaral.

To that end, the virtual card program that Amaral set up two years ago served the state well, allowing detailed spend management and expediting reconciliation processes.

“One of the benefits of the HRS program was that the state of California was able to leverage the existing Citibank virtual card program that was already established. The state of California then worked with HRS to coordinate payment integration,” said Amaral.

HRS provides a daily booking report that the state of California matches to its monthly Citi statement. The program uses multiple virtual card number accounts to rotate based on available credit. HRS provides each hotel with the payment instructions at the time of reservation. After check-out, HRS chases the folios. The state audits each folio for accuracy and to ensure only room and tax are charged. It is then matched to the charge on the Citi statement. VCN account data is provided to Citi so the reconciliation process is seamless. Finally, the state uses the data to create a “claim schedule” through the state’s financial system to generate payment.

This is the reason every participating hotel was required to accept virtual payment. “It wouldn’t work any other way,” said Amaral. “We couldn’t expect people to put these charges on their personal cards and wait for reimbursement,” especially since healthcare workers could be staying for extended time periods. Amaral was quick to note that all incidentals were put on personal cards.

Managing State Finances

The Covid-19 pandemic has revealed many financial weaknesses as it has torn across the U.S. in the last 10 months, including the fragility of state budgets to deal with emergencies of this magnitude. Shepherding taxpayer funds, reducing risk exposure and protecting state finances has always been a priority for Amaral. This emergency lodging program was not an exception.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency was committed to reimbursing 75 percent of the program. But the state needed to present detailed data on every stay, with taxes broken out, to qualify for reimbursement.

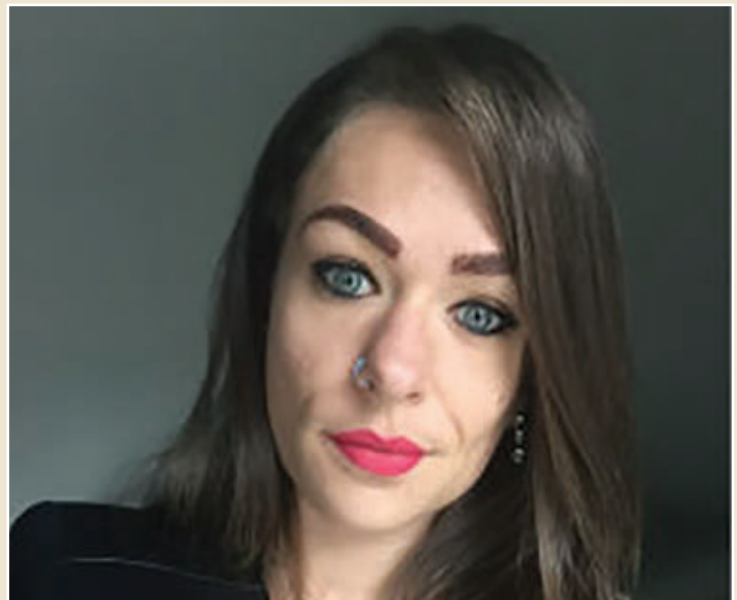
“The federal requirements are strict,” said Amaral. “We have to match to the booked data, and it goes to comptroller to get paid. Then we send reporting to FEMA to get [reimbursed].”

HRS said it was in talks with several states to power similar programs, but a spokesperson for the company said California proved a great partner because of Amaral’s foundational work with virtual cards and his comprehensive understanding of payment and reporting.

For Benakis, the process was eye-opening for a different reason and shows what is possible when industry partners can break down barriers and really come together: “We did what would traditionally be a 16-week sourcing project in two weeks, with rates loaded and available,” she said, adding that the experience changed her expectations going forward. “We don’t need to get so bogged down in ‘we’ve always done it this way.’”

For Amaral, establishing a hotel program and shining a spotlight on what a formal program can achieve has laid a path to creating a bona fide hotel program for the entire state of California.

“We have the attention of upper management now. California has \$100 million in transient lodging [annually]. We need to manage it well and we need the technology to support it,” said Amaral. “Setting up this program in a crisis, brought everything into alignment. Everyone now sees what the end result could be.” ■



BTN 2020 BEST PRACTITIONER

Mondelez International’s Sabrina Hinke

Mondelez International travel manager for the Americas Sabrina Hinke had been revving up her meetings management and sourcing strategy for at least a year and was ready to launch in March 2020. The first official case of Covid-19 was in Brazil was confirmed on Feb. 26 in a man returning from a business trip to Italy. We all know what happened next: The meetings industry hit a hard stop worldwide, along with business travel.

But Mondelez’s pilot program for a big data-based meetings sourcing program had already realized significant savings. It used technology start-up company Troop, which ingests meeting parameters like attendee origin data, desired meeting dates, type of hotel, ground transportation options—as well as wear-and-tear issues like airline connections and travel policy details—and returns suggested meeting locations based on a company’s priorities. The tool had enabled dozens of Mondelez’s decentralized meeting planners to understand instantly how they could maximize the value of their meeting.

The tool not only ramped up value, it ramped down research time for internal meetings organizers and significantly reduced procurement exercises that were often outsourced to a third-party meetings agency.

“Our meeting organizers had such positive feedback on the tool we provided,” said Hinke. “It totally changed the process for us—and also worked as an engagement tool to bring meeting organizers into the program.” Furthermore, said Hinke, the tool was customized to Mondelez’s needs.

The latter was a benefit of collaborating with a start-up. Troop needed a strong partner to get its tool working in a real-world corporate environment. Taking a chance on a newcomer, Hinke was also able to engage her internal stakeholders to offer feedback and make changes to the platform—changes that also enhanced the performance of the tool for Troop’s future customers.

Those changes didn’t stop in 2020. Troop was early to roll out Covid-19 hotspot data into its platform, preparing clients for a not-to-distant future in which meetings will once again be high points on the calendar. Additionally, said Hinke, Mondelez is trending toward more local meetings, especially as international borders remain largely closed. She has worked with Troop to leverage more local information to facilitate these meeting itineraries, but she knows she’ll be ready to scale and move seamlessly to international itineraries as meeting request volumes return in 2021.

—Elizabeth West

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EC Sustainability Strategy Points to Major Corp. Travel Changes

BY AMON COHEN

Easier planning and booking of air and train journeys, standardized emissions measurements, improved cross-border rail ticketing, financial protection for passengers against supplier failure and more taxation of aviation. All this could lie ahead for European business travelers following the Dec. 9 publication of the European Commission's Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy, an action plan of 82 regulatory and other initiatives to guide its transport policy for the next four years.

The plan aims to keep European citizens moving while taking steps needed "to achieve a 90 percent reduction in transport-related greenhouse gas emissions by 2050," the Commission said. "Today, transport accounts for a quarter of the EU's total greenhouse gas emissions and emissions have increased over recent years." Ideas outlined in the strategy include providing an EU-wide recharging and refueling structure to encourage uptake of low- and zero-emission road vehicles. Proposals of key interest to corporate travel can be broken down into five key areas.

Joining Air and Rail for Multi-Modal Travel

The Commission will look to revise in 2021 and 2022 all relevant legislation to reflect a target of 2030 for transport operators to offer "carbon-neutral choices for scheduled collective travel below 500 km within the EU." This means airlines should be connecting to and selling high-speed rail in preference to or alongside their own flights up to that distance.

The hurdle, said the Commission, is that "planning multimodal journeys and purchasing the necessary tickets is often cumbersome, as a framework for EU-wide, integrated, multimodal travel information, ticketing and payment services is currently lacking.

"To make this a reality, we need to overcome issues related to the availability and accessibility of data, sub-optimal cooperation between suppliers and vendors and an overall lack of interoperability, for example.

"We will therefore examine whether data-sharing and selling arrangements are fit for purpose ... Starting in 2021, the Commission will propose regulatory measures to enable innovative and flexible tickets that combine various transport modes and give passengers true options for door-to-door travel."

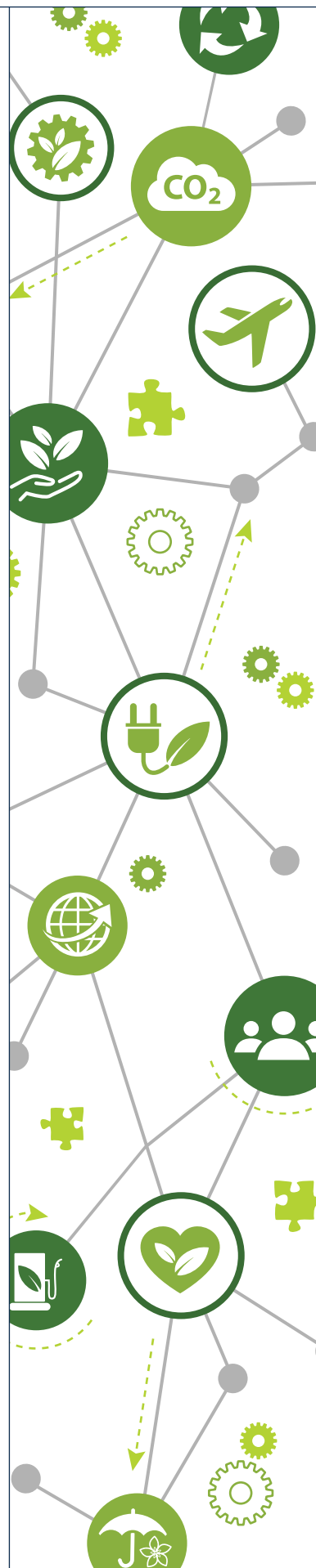
According to EU Travel Tech, an association representing the major global distribution systems plus some travel management companies and online travel agencies, current arrangements are decidedly not fit for purpose. Secretary general Emmanuel Mounier told BTN that the indirect distribution channel, as represented by his membership, could play a key role in combining and selling different modes of travel for a single trip, but only if data sharing between transport suppliers is improved.

Yet, Mounier claimed, airlines have been moving in the opposite direction by diverting more content exclusively through their direct sales channels. "We hope the Commission will take steps to regulate data sharing," Mounier said. "The big problem is lack of access to transactable information. Without regulation, nothing will happen."

The Commission will reflect its commitment to multi-modal travel in its proposals for revising the CRS Code of Conduct, which regulates how GDSs operate, expected in the fourth quarter of 2021. More generally, the Commission added it will consider "the rights and obligations of online intermediaries and multimodal digital service providers selling ticketing and/or mobility services." It will also promote electronic ticketing for rail to improve interoperability with air e-tickets.

Standardization and Mandatory Listing of Emissions Data

The Commission wants travelers to receive mandatory information about the carbon footprint of all travel options presented to them dur-



ing planning. "This is why the Commission plans to establish a European framework for the harmonised measurement of transport and logistics greenhouse gas emissions," it said, adding that "the most sustainable choice should be clearly indicated. Information on the carbon footprint of a specific journey could become a new passenger right and ... should apply to all transport modes."

Mounier welcomed the target of standardizing greenhouse gas emissions measurement, noting that airlines use different criteria today, making it hard for intermediaries to display accurate comparisons.

Potential Passenger Protection Against Airline Failure

During the next two years, the Commission will consider whether to propose a "financial protection scheme to protect passengers against the risk of a liquidity crisis or an insolvency regarding the reimbursement of tickets and if needed their repatriation." This issue was key in 2020, when airlines including Flybe have gone bust, leaving passengers out of pocket.

Another Push for Cross-Border Rail Ticketing

The Commission aims to double high-speed rail traffic by 2030, and wants to make rail more attractive by simplifying the use and purchase of cross-border tickets, a notoriously difficult undertaking because of numerous inconsistencies among different rail operators' systems. An action plan will be unveiled in 2021.

Aviation Taxes Loom until Emissions Decline

The Commission wants to get tougher on users of fossil fuels, most notably aviation and shipping. It is therefore contemplating measures which could push up the cost of air travel.

In 2021, it will present a proposal to reduce free Emissions Trading Scheme allowances for airlines. On a principle that "fossil-fuel subsidies should end," the Commission also said it is "looking closely at current tax exemptions, including for aviation and maritime fuels, and will make a proposal on how best to close any loopholes in 2021." A review of value-added tax exemptions for international passenger transport will follow in 2022.

At the same time, the strategy outlines plans to help aviation shift to lower-emission, and eventually zero-emission, aircraft. ■



U.S. CDC to Require Covid-19 Tests for All Inbound International Flights

BY MICHAEL B. BAKER

The United States will begin requiring all inbound travelers on international flights to show proof of a negative Covid-19 test, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced.

CDC director Robert Redfield this month signed an order, effective Jan. 26, requiring all air passengers entering the United States to show proof of a negative test taken within three days of their flight. Airlines will have to deny boarding to any passenger that cannot provide that documentation.

The CDC since late December has required negative tests for travelers arriving from the United Kingdom, following the discovery of a more communicable variant of Covid-19 spreading in the country. While that variant since has appeared in several different areas of the United States as well, the testing requirement could prevent the arrival of other variants and could slow the surging infection numbers in the United States, according to the CDC.

The CDC also is recommending passengers get tested again within three to five days of their arrival and stay home for seven days upon arrival. "Testing does not eliminate all risk, but when combined with a period of staying at home and everyday precautions like wearing masks and social distancing, it can make travel safer, healthier, and more responsible by reducing spread on planes, in airports and at destinations," Redfield said in a statement.

Entry restrictions also remain in place for most foreign nationals traveling to the United States who have been in the United Kingdom, the European Schengen area, China, Brazil, Ireland



"Testing does not eliminate all risk, but when combined with a period of staying at home and everyday precautions like wearing masks and social distancing, it can make travel safer, healthier, and more responsible by reducing spread on planes, in airports, and at destinations."

—CDC'S ROBERT REDFIELD

and Iran within a 14-day period prior to arrival.

United Airlines in a statement regarding the CDC's order said that it "already has procedures in place to comply with similar orders for international jurisdictions, and we will plan on expanding those in light of this new mandate. Additionally, United is actively working to introduce new technologies and processes to make navigating these testing requirements easier both for our employees and our customers."

American Airlines in a statement said that it "supports the implementation of a global program to require Covid-19 testing for travelers to the United States. American is working closely with U.S. authorities as it implements this new order and, at the same time, taking care of any affected customers by assisting them with rebooking options." ■

England, Scotland Add New Covid Entry Rules

BY MARK FRARY

New rules that require anyone arriving in England and Scotland to have a negative Covid-19 test came into force on Jan. 15.

All inbound passengers to England and Scotland arriving by plane, train or ship now must take a test no more than three days before departure and provide evidence of a negative result to their transport provider before they travel. Providers may deny boarding "where appropriate" to reduce the numbers of noncompliant arrivals.

A Covid test will be required even for those countries on the government's travel corridor list for arrivals in England. Travelers from countries not on the list will still be able to shorten their quarantine to five days through England's test to release scheme.

The U.K. government said the test must be "of a diagnostic-standard test such as a polymerase

chain reaction test, and could in some cases include LAMP and lateral flow tests within set limits."

Aviation minister Robert Courts said, "We will set out the information passengers will need to have with them at check-in and the U.K. border to show they have had a qualifying negative test. This will include set data fields which test result certificates must include. All information on test requirements will be made available to passengers and transport operators through guidance on [UK government website] gov.uk."

Arrivals from three overseas territories – St Helena, Ascension Island and the Falklands – will not be required to test because of a lack of infrastructure.

Noncompliant passengers arriving in England face fines starting at £500 while those without certificates arriving in Scotland will be served with a fixed penalty notice of £480. Operators can also be fined for

carrying noncompliant travelers.

The U.K. aviation minister said that the measures are likely to be in place until the end of the current lockdown, although a review will take place before the end of that period.

Courts added, "We have worked closely with the international travel sector during the course of the pandemic and will continue to do so as we emerge from lockdown and are able to encourage people to travel again with confidence."

Scottish transport secretary Michael Matheson said: "Non-essential travel into or out of Scotland is currently illegal and that will remain the case while we work to suppress the new strain of Covid-19 and the requirement for pre-departure testing does not change this."

The devolved governments of Wales and Northern Ireland are expected to follow suit. ■



CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

Brexit Travel Fallout Begins

far of what will and won't be allowed in practice.

"The challenge that we have seen is inconsistency in terms of rules and regulations and paperwork required," said Donna Joines, regional operations manager for the TMC Corporate Traveller UK. "This is becoming increasingly frustrating for our clients in the energy sector and food and beverage industries, whose business travel is essential right now. Our consultants check four different information sources to advise clients of the latest regulations, but an airline supplier may only be using one source. The rules can differ depending on which source is being used."

Joines said that last week a client sent travelers on successive days from the U.K. to Budapest via Amsterdam. "One traveler on Monday had no issues at immigration and made the connecting flight," she said. "Then on Tuesday, the other traveler was stopped in Amsterdam and told he wasn't allowed to board the flight to Budapest because he needed a work permit to enter Hungary."

The TCA states that, for entry to Hungary, Cyprus and Denmark, a "work permit, including economic needs test, [is] required in case the short-term business visitor supplies a service."

Joines said: "The problem was exacerbated because in normal times, if there is an issue with a traveler missing a connecting flight, there would be an alternative flight later the same day. But at the moment flight schedules are vastly reduced, meaning the only alternative is for the traveler to return to the U.K."

Meanwhile, the London-based consultancy travel manager, speaking on condition of anonymity, told BTN he is urgently reviewing his travel program in light of the new post-Brexit rules. "The lawyers are telling me that we need to go and get visas," he said. "London is a net exporter of consultants to the rest of the world, especially the EU. All of a sudden, those consultants will need a visa to work in France or Germany and will need a different visa for each of them. We're not clear what the process is to get a visa."

Most overseas consulting work is on hold anyway owing to travel restrictions caused by the coronavirus. But, once travel is allowed again, the travel manager said his company will look in many cases to reassign U.K. passport holders to projects within the U.K. Projects in the EU are likely to be assigned to those consultants in the London office with EU passports.

"This will add friction points to our operation," the travel manager said. "Any service sector company will now have to think twice before sending employees from the U.K. to the EU or in the other direction." The travel manager added that the challenge will be especially formidable for smaller consultancies and other service companies lacking significant internal resources.

The same travel manager said the new constraints on EU-U.K. travel is likely to play havoc with corporate airline agreements. "I don't know where my guys are going to fly next and I have no idea what my route networks are going to look like. I would prefer to do network-wide deals rather than route deals so that no matter where I go I'm covered. Almost every airline has asked me how Brexit will affect our travel patterns. Covid is short-term uncertainty but Brexit is a long-term uncertainty," the travel manager said.

Raquel Gómez Salas, a global immigration counsel for London-based visa and immigration service provider Newland Chase, warned business travel from the U.K. to the EU will involve substantial paperwork, and equally substantial confusion, in many



"The challenge that we have seen is inconsistency in terms of rules and regulations and paperwork required."

—CORPORATE TRAVELLER UK'S
DONNA JOINES

cases. "Any short-term activity not included in the TCA will require work authorization unless it is work-permit-exempt by the national immigration rules of the particular EU country where the activities take place," she said.

"But there is still uncertainty around how each EU country will interpret the list of permitted activities to short-term business visitors included in the TCA. We would still need to understand the views of each specific EU country, and there is little or no guidance yet in this regard."

Very similar challenges will complicate the planning of business trips to the U.K. from the European Economic Area—the EU plus Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein—according to Robert Houchill, an associate with law firm Kingsley Napley, also based in London.

"Often a visitor's planned activities do not fall neatly within the terms of the 'permitted activities' and it can be difficult to determine what is and is not allowed," said Houchill.

"Perhaps the more common permitted activities are attending meetings or conferences, negotiating and signing deals and contracts, carrying out site visits and inspections, and gathering information for employment overseas. The rules for intra-corporate visitors (overseas employees of a U.K.-based company) are a bit more generous and allow for some training, advising and consulting and sharing skills and knowledge for an internal project, but provided the visitor is not dealing directly with clients.

"When engaging with EEA nationals in the U.K., companies now need to use the same thinking as with U.S., Chinese or Indian nationals, namely what type of activities will the individual be doing and is a work visa required?" Houchill said.

What's Not Clear Yet

It's now clear that Brexit is having a significant effect on British business travelers within the EU. Longer-term effects are not as clear but could include several potential outcomes.

Potential economic impact on business travel volumes and costs:

In normal times, there is a clear correlation between growth or contraction in gross domestic product and business travel volumes. The U.K.'s Institute for Fiscal Studies has estimated that leaving the EU Single Market and Customs Union at the end of the transition period with a trade deal will hit GDP by 2.1 percent in 2021. Leaving without a deal would have weakened growth by an additional 0.5-1.0 percent.

However, business travel is at record low levels because of the Covid-19 pandemic, so any additional depressive effect caused by Brexit may be hard to discern. The situation could become more evident as global business travel begins to recover.

Also to be seen is whether added complexities and restrictions will inhibit business travel between the U.K. and EU. There could be a shift to more long-haul travel as U.K. businesses are forced to seek growth beyond Europe. If that happens, costs per trip are likely to rise owing to longer flights and more nights away.

Personal data transfers: Now the transition period has ended, the EU is taking six months to assess whether the U.K.'s data privacy rules and processes are adequately aligned with EU standards. If they are found wanting, then the same problems could arise as currently trouble the transfer of personal data about travelers from the EEA to the United States. "As a sensible precaution before and during this six month period, it is recommended that you work with EEA organizations who transfer personal data to you to put in place alternative transfer mechanisms to safeguard against any interruption to the free flow of EU to U.K. personal data," said the U.K. government.

Reservations systems legislation: Could the laws governing global distribution systems change in the U.K.? The EU operates a code of conduct for computerized reservations systems which, for example, places restrictions on how global distribution system displays can be biased. The trade agreement specifies the right for the U.K. to set its own rules on reservation systems. ■

"There is still uncertainty around how each EU country will interpret the list of permitted activities to short-term business visitors included in the TCA. We still need to understand the views of each specific EU country, and there is little or no guidance yet in this regard."

**—NEWLAND CHASE'S
RAQUEL GÓMEZ SALAS**

The Trade and Cooperation Agreement permit the following activities for short-term business visitors from the U.K. to the EU and vice versa without a work permit but will likely need further clarification.

Note: The phrase "a legal person of the party of which the short-term business visitor is a natural person" may be loosely considered to mean "a company for which the short-term business visitor is performing work."

Meetings and consultations: natural persons attending meetings or conferences, or engaged in consultations with business associates

Research and design: technical, scientific and statistical researchers conducting independent research or research for a legal person of the party of which the short-term business visitor is a natural person

Marketing research: market researchers and analysts conducting research or analysis for a legal person of the party of which the short-term business visitor is a natural person

Training seminars: personnel of an enterprise who enter the territory being visited by the short-term business visitor to receive training in techniques and work practices which are utilized by companies or organizations in the territory being visited by the short-term business visitor, provided that the training received is confined to observation, familiarization and classroom instruction only

Trade fairs and exhibitions: personnel attending a trade fair for the purpose of promoting their company or its products or services

Sales: representatives of a supplier of services or goods taking orders or negotiating the sale of services or goods or entering into agreements to sell services or goods for that supplier, but not delivering goods or supplying services themselves; short-term business visitors shall not engage in making direct sales to the general public

Purchasing: buyers purchasing goods or services for an enterprise, or management and supervisory personnel, engaging in a commercial transaction carried out in the territory of the party of which the short-term business visitor is a natural person

After-sales or after-lease service: installers, repair and maintenance personnel and supervisors, possessing specialized knowledge essential to a seller's contractual obligation, supplying services or training workers to supply services pursuant to a warranty or other service contract incidental to the sale or lease of commercial or industrial equipment or machinery, including computer software, purchased or leased from a legal person of the party of which the short-term business visitor is a natural person throughout the duration of the warranty or service contract

Commercial transactions: management and supervisory personnel and financial services personnel (including insurers, bankers and investment brokers) engaging in a commercial transaction for a legal person of the party of which the short-term business visitor is a natural person

Tourism personnel: tour and travel agents, tour guides or tour operators attending or participating in conventions or accompanying a tour that has begun in the territory of the party of which the short-term business visitor is a natural person

Translation and interpretation: translators or interpreters supplying services as employees of a legal person of the party of which the short-term business visitor is a natural person

Source: Trade and Cooperation Agreement Between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community, of the One Part, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, of the Other Part

Delta Cites Corp. Customer Sentiment for 2021 Optimism

BY MICHAEL B. BAKER

Delta Air Lines expects to reach a breakeven point by the spring, with corporate travel recovery following after that, executives said in an earnings call this month.

The carrier is planning for three phases of 2021, Delta president Glen Hauenstein said. The first, over the next few months, will include “demand choppiness” and a shortened booking curve. Delta projects its daily cash burn in the first quarter will be in the range of \$10 million to \$15 million. For the second phase, Delta expects easing restrictions to lengthen booking windows and spur leisure demand, at which point they can reach a breakeven point. The final phase, in which vaccinations are widespread and offices begin to reopen, Delta projects will begin in the second half of the year.

A recent survey of Delta’s corporate customers indicated that most are planning to return to offices and restart corporate travel by the third quarter, and 40 percent of large customers said they expect their travel volumes to be back to 2019 levels by 2022, CEO Ed Bastian said. Eleven percent said it would take until 2023 to return to 2019 volumes, and 7 percent said they would never get back to pre-Covid volumes, he said. The rest were not yet sure.

Of those who said they would never return to 2019 levels or are not yet sure, “even if you assumed only 50 percent of their travel returns, that gets you 75 percent of the way back no later than 2023, and I think that’s the very pessimistic view on business travel [recovery],” Bastian said. “So, when we’re talking about corporate travel returning, I felt optimistic when I saw those results.”

In the fourth quarter of 2020, corporate travel demand was only about 10 percent to 15 percent of the prior year’s levels, but corporate revenue recovery was about three points higher than what it was in the third quarter of 2020, Hauenstein said. Small and medium-sized business travel volumes continue to recover faster than large company volumes, he said.

“These are small business owners who need to get out to their customers and have to work hard every single day to keep their

Delta’s policy of blocking middle seats is “generating a meaningful premium,” Bastian said, but no decisions have been made as to whether to discontinue it after the end of March.

sales and their business moving,” Bastian said. “We do see a meaningful continued improvement in small business traffic, some that we can measure and others that we can’t, because they’re not under contracts with us.”

Delta also claimed its “highest levels in our history” of corporate business share—albeit of a small overall pie, Bastian said. In part, Delta is crediting its policy of blocking middle seats, which is “generating a meaningful premium,” Bastian said. The carrier currently has extended its no-middle-seat policy through the end of March—longer than any other major U.S. carrier—and Bastian said that no decisions have been made as to whether to discontinue it after that. Hauenstein said the adding back middle seats would be a “powerful tool” to add capacity at little cost as demand warrants it.

For the fourth quarter, Delta’s passenger revenue was down 74 percent year over year to \$2.7 billion. Delta reported a net loss of \$755 million for the fourth quarter and \$12.4 billion for full-year 2020.

Delta Hires Int’l Leader

Meanwhile, Delta has hired former Bombardier president and CEO Alain Bellemare as president of its international organization, Bastian announced in a memo this month.

Bellemare will report directly to Bastian. Steve Sear, who had been president of international as well as EVP of global sales, will continue to lead Delta’s global sales team ■

Sonesta Agrees to Buy Red Lion Hotels for \$90M

BY DONNA M. AIROLDI

Sonesta International Hotels has entered into an agreement to acquire Red Lion Hotels’ parent company, RLH Corp., in an all-cash transaction valued at approximately \$90 million, the companies announced Dec. 30.

The deal completes an exceptional year for Sonesta, which during 2020 added 103 properties formerly managed by InterContinental Hotels Group and 122 properties that were under Marriott International flags. Both IHG and Marriott had gone into default on the hotels with owner Service Properties Trust, which also owns about 34 percent of Sonesta.

“Sonesta started 2020 as a manager of 58 hotels under three Sonesta-specific brands in the U.S.,” said Sonesta president and CEO Carlos Flores in a statement. “Upon the completion of hotel conversions previously announced and the acquisition of RLH, Sonesta will become one of the largest hotel companies in the U.S., with approximately 1,200 hotels under a diverse set of 13 brands in multiple market segments.”

Sonesta also announced that 35-year industry veteran Keith Pierce will join the company as executive vice president and president of franchise and

development. Most recently, he served as president and managing partner of the Passionality Group, a hospitality investment and management advisory firm. Previously he worked at Wyndham Worldwide.

Under the terms of the merger agreement, holders of RLH’s common stock will receive \$3.50 per share in cash. The acquisition, which is expected to close in the first half of 2021, is subject to customary closing conditions, including the approval of RLH’s shareholders. Upon completion of the transaction, RLH will become a privately held company and its common stock no longer will be listed on the New York Stock Exchange. ■



JetBlue, American Airlines Further Partnership After DOT's Approval

American Airlines and JetBlue are proceeding with their strategic alliance following the end of a review by the U.S. Department of Transportation, which required a few concessions from the carriers.

With the partnership, which had been under review since the carriers announced it in July, the carriers will build their network in the North-eastern United States. JetBlue is planning "significant growth" at New York's LaGuardia Airport as well as up to 70 daily flights at Newark Liberty International Airport, according to JetBlue head of revenue and planning Scott Laurence. American Airlines, meanwhile, will upgauge aircraft

and by year-end will be offering First Class on all of its flights out of New York. American also will begin service to both Tel Aviv and Athens out of New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport this summer, the first long-haul international service it has added out of New York in four years.

The carriers plan to begin codesharing later this quarter on select flights out of New York and Boston, a total of 60 American routes and 130 JetBlue routes, and will begin aligning schedules in the two cities in the first half of the year. Reciprocal loyalty program benefits will begin later this year, according to the carriers.

Both Southwest Airlines and Spirit Airlines were among those filing objections to the partnership to DOT, citing competition concerns. Per their agreement with DOT, JetBlue and American will divest some slots at JFK and Washington Reagan National Airport and have also committed to their capacity expansion plans. In addition, JetBlue and American will not coordinate "in city pair markets where they are substantial competitors to each other and there is little service from other airlines," according to the carriers. ■

New Covid Test Requirement Prompts Air Canada, WestJet Capacity Cut

Air Canada and WestJet announced capacity cuts and workforce reductions following new entry requirements enacted this month by the Canadian government.

Canada this month began requiring all inbound passengers age five and older to show proof of a negative Covid-19 polymerase chain reaction test within 72 hours of departure in addition to 14-day quarantine requirements, which remain in place regardless of passengers' test results.

WestJet is cutting nearly a third of its planned capacity for February and March in light of stricter entry requirements for Canada announced in recent weeks.

Since then, Air Canada has seen "an immediate impact to our close-in bookings, and [we] have made the difficult but necessary decision to further adjust our schedule and rationalize our transborder, Caribbean and domestic routes to better reflect expected demand and to reduce cash burn," EVP and chief commercial officer Lucie Guillemette said in a statement.

With the new capacity cuts, Air Canada will be operating about 20 percent of the capacity it had operated in the first quarter of 2019. The carrier also is cutting its workforce by about 1,700 employees and is working with unions on mitigation programs.

WestJet's cuts include more than 230 weekly flights, 160 of them domestic. WestJet is suspending 11 routes: Edmonton to

each Cancun, Puerto Vallarta and Phoenix; Vancouver to those same three cities as well as Cabo, Los Angeles and Palm Springs; and Calgary to both Las Vegas and Orlando. The carrier also announced a seasonal suspension to 13 international destinations, largely in the Caribbean and Central America but also including London Gatwick.

"This hasty new measure is causing Canadian travelers unnecessary stress and confusion and may make travel unaffordable, unfeasible and inaccessible for Canadians for years to come."

—WESTJET'S ED SIMS

After the cuts, international capacity will be down 93 percent year over year to only five daily flights, and total capacity will be down 80 percent year over year to 150 daily flights. That will mark WestJet's lowest capacity levels in nearly two decades.

Additionally, WestJet is enacting tempo-

rary layoffs, unpaid leaves and reduced hours, cutting the equivalent of 1,000 employees.

After the new testing requirements were announced on Dec. 31, WestJet saw "significant reductions in new bookings and unprecedented cancellations," according to WestJet president and CEO Ed Sims.

"We have advocated over the past 10 months for a coordinated testing regime on Canadian soil, but this hasty new measure is causing Canadian travelers unnecessary stress and confusion and may make travel unaffordable, unfeasible and inaccessible for Canadians for years to come," Sims said in a statement.

CARRIERS READY MAX SERVICE

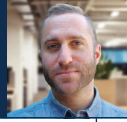
A WestJet spokesperson said the capacity cuts would not have an impact on its return-to-service plans announced this month for Boeing 737 Max aircraft.

The carrier had set a return date of Jan. 21, at which point Max aircraft would fly on three of its six weekly flights between Calgary and Toronto. It would keep that schedule for four weeks as it considers other routes and frequencies on which it would use the aircraft.

Air Canada will begin flying the Boeing 737 Max on commercial routes again next month, with plans for it to "gradually return" to its North American route network.

Canada's aviation regulatory body Transport Canada on Jan. 18 issued an Airworthiness Directive for Boeing 737 Max aircraft, clearing the aircraft type to return to Canadian airspace on Tuesday. Air Canada, which has 24 Boeing 737 Max 8 aircraft in its fleet, on Feb. 1 will begin flying the aircraft on select flights between Toronto and each Halifax, Montreal, Ottawa, Edmonton and Winnipeg.

The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration rescinded its grounding order for the Max aircraft in November. American Airlines in late December became the first U.S. carrier to return the aircraft to commercial service. An American Airlines spokesperson said that it has not seen any data indicating that travelers are avoiding Max flights and that their bookings are comparable to other aircraft. ■



TravelPerk Acquires NexTravel to Grow Footprint in United States

In a move that significantly expands its presence in the U.S. market, Barcelona-based TravelPerk has acquired corporate travel booking and management provider NexTravel, bringing what it says is more than 700 new U.S. client organizations under TravelPerk's umbrella, along with NexTravel's technology platform and workforce.

Founded in 2013 and launched in 2015 from Y Combinator, Santa Monica, Calif.-based NexTravel says it has processed more than 300,000 trips over its booking platform to date.

Terms of the deal were not disclosed.

For TravelPerk, the acquisition is intended to serve as an anchor point for further growth in the U.S., according to company CEO Avi Meir.

"The U.S. market is already important for us—unsurprisingly, as the largest economy in the world—but this acquisition will help us significantly grow our presence there," said Meir. "We've [now] doubled the size of our team on the ground and grown our client base and expertise. In fact, after this acquisition, the U.S. will become our biggest market."

In another addition to its U.S. capabilities, TravelPerk also has reached a new deal with Southwest Airlines to make the carrier's full inventory available within its booking tool.

Corporate travel in the U.S and most other markets remains at a near-standstill amid the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, but Meir said TravelPerk views the halt in travel activity as an opportunity to bolster its platform and grow the company into a "force to be reckoned with" in the U.S. once travel

"It is part of TravelPerk's strategy to keep getting stronger by acquiring other companies and integrating their expertise and talented teams to build long-term growth."

—TRAVELPERK'S AVI MEIR

gets up and running again.

"We've been able to invest significantly in our products and technology and move quickly to strengthen our offering, giving us a great platform for continued growth in our priority markets, particularly the U.S.," according to Meir.

Indeed, TravelPerk rolled out several new features in 2020, including a Covid-19 data tracking tool built using technology acquired via its purchase of risk management startup Albatross in July 2020. Other new offerings launched last year include a value-added tax reclamation service and a carbon mitigation program. The company also opened its tech platform to enable clients and third-party supplier to build custom integrations and applications using TravelPerk's application programming interfaces.

As to travel's return, Meir said he projects that, provided recently released vaccine programs are successful, "we could start to see travel regaining its pre-pandemic levels" in the second half of 2021—boosted by a surge in pent-up demand as travelers make up for lost time by reconnecting with clients and colleagues face-to-face.

For now, Meir said TravelPerk will spend the next year moving the entirety of NexTravel's client base over to the TravelPerk platform—and additional purchases could be on the way, he added.

"It is part of TravelPerk's strategy to keep getting stronger by acquiring other companies and integrating their expertise and talented teams to build long-term growth," said Meir. ■

Trondent Adds Covid Controls to Pre-Trip Approval Tools

Corporate travel technology specialist Trondent Development Corp. has added a new Covid-19 messaging add-on to its Authorizer AI and Authorizer Pro pre-trip approval platforms, enabling travel managers to deliver relevant Covid-related information and alerts via email to travelers and trip approvers, the company announced.

Travel managers can select from a number of data parameters to determine when an alert is sent and which information is included, based on company policy, Trondent said. Messaging can include a range of attributes for a specific destination, such as number of cases, recent infection trends, lockdown and social distancing parameters and entry requirements. Once a traveler attempts to book a trip, an email detailing in- and out-of-compliance aspects of the booking is sent to the approver, who can approve or deny the request. After a trip is approved, the traveler receives an email with destination-relevant Covid-related data and corporate policy information.

Pre-trip approval parameters have seen a resurgence amid the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic as corporate travel managers seek to fulfill duty-of-care responsibilities. Suppliers including Adelman Travel and Cornerstone Information Systems have rolled out new tools designed to incorporate Covid-specific policy elements into pre-trip approval flows. ■

Conferma Adds Automated Option to Virtual Payment Platform

Virtual payment specialist Conferma Pay is offering a new option for organizations making virtual card payments to hotels within its Connect platform, adding a direct payment channel to its previously existing secure email and API options.

Built in partnership with digital payment technology provider NTT Data, the new service enables virtual card numbers to be sent directly to a hotel's property management and payment acceptance systems. That model, known as straight through processing (STP), eliminates the need for hotel staff to manually enter virtual card numbers delivered via secure email, API or fax—thereby increasing efficiency and security and reducing the chance of error, Conferma said.

The new direct payment option is a bid to further streamline the use of virtual payments in the hotel space; while secure email and API delivery obviated the need to fax virtual card information to a property, STP automates the entire payment delivery process, according to Conferma.

Conferma Pay Connect will continue to offer the secure email and API virtual payment delivery options, the company said. Along with those channels, Conferma continues to focus on the delivery and use of virtual cards through its mobile app, which can be accepted via contactless payment systems at hotel front desks, and subsequently used for additional expenses during the course of a trip. ■



Hilton Hotels to Launch Hybrid Event Program



Hilton Hotels this month will launch globally a program for hybrid meetings and events that requires higher tech capacity for participating hotels, the company announced.

The Hilton EventReady Hybrid Solutions program for meetings and events is part of Hilton's EventReady program for groups, introduced last July, which initially built upon the framework of the company's CleanStay program.

Under the new hybrid program, participating hotels will be required to have a minimum amount of incremental and available IT bandwidth above the hotel's average circuit-use level. Hotels also will continue to provide multi-site offering and express agreements, designed to incentivize planners to book the in-person portion of their events at multiple hybrid-ready Hilton locations. Hundreds of hybrid-ready properties across the United States and Canada are listed on the Hilton website.

Hilton also has expanded the hybrid chapter of its EventReady program playbook. Beginning this month, it will include case studies, tips and a glossary of hybrid event terms.

In addition, as part of EventReady Hybrid Solutions, Encore (formerly known as PSAV) will offer several event technology packages created for small hybrid events at participating hotels that provide the company's Presentation Stages production solution, with broadcast technology and staging equipment. Hotels currently with this technology include the Conrad Fort Lauderdale Beach, Hilton Atlanta, Hilton Anatole, Hilton Denver and The Beverly Hilton. Additional locations being made available this year include properties in Cleveland, Minneapolis, New York, Washington, D.C., Europe, the Middle East and Africa, according to the company. ■

Meetings Platform Troop Piloting Program with Egencia

Meetings technology platform Troop, which last year shortened its name from Troop-Travel, is in the midst of a pilot program offering the service through travel management company Egencia, Troop co-founder Dennis Vilovic told BTN. If successful, Troop would roll out the new offering to customers on a larger scale in 2021.

Troop's platform locates cost-efficient meeting destinations based on attendees' origin points and corporate travel policies. Neither Vilovic nor Egencia offered further details of the pilot, but Vilovic said other TMCs are exploring ways to integrate the Troop service.

"By having a platform which pulls a lot of different data points together, you can provide a better service to your customers," he said of TMCs. "It is a key focus for [2021]

to build that ecosystem of partners to offer this seamless experience of an end-to-end solution for the customer."

Just prior to the pandemic, Troop added local transportation options to its platform, including public transit, rail and car for consideration when determining an optimal meeting location. During the pandemic, Troop rebranded, improved its user interface and user experience, and enhanced its product, Vilovic said.

"The big thing that has changed is the way we look at meetings and events," Vilovic said. "We've developed a scientific methodology around planning and addressing what we call the four Ss: safety, service, sustainability and savings. We feel these are four key criteria for any meeting planning."

Troop now feeds different data points in each of these four categories, he said, and those points can be rated. Figures for each category are aggregated into one score, with which users can rank locations.

"The end result the technology produces is a very personal result for [a client's] specific use case," he said, adding that Troop takes into account travel restrictions in finding destinations. Once a destination is selected, "[planners] can talk to their meeting participants and tell them that the planning is based on data points, and they can say why they made certain decisions. Companies are able to really empower their travelers with confidence to actually have meetings again. [Because] there is no doubt that virtual cannot replace certain elements of in-person interactions, which is the basis of business travel or meetings and events—the relationship building, the networking. It's very difficult to achieve virtually."

Vilovic claimed Troop since January 2020 has tripled its customers, tripled its workforce from three to nine, and has seen an increase in year-over-year revenues.

"We are fortunate," Vilovic said. "When I talk to people, everyone thinks that since we are in the meeting and event space, that we are suffering. But we were lucky that in our case, that was not the case." ■



Sabre, Southwest Reach 11th-Hour Deal To Salvage, Enhance Distribution Pact

BY JAY BOEHMER

As 2020 drew to a close, it seemed unlikely that Southwest Airlines and Sabre could salvage their bare-bones basic-booking request participation arrangement set to expire on Dec. 31, let alone reach a full-participation global distribution system deal, which had eluded them for years.

While Amadeus and Travelport reached new GDS deals with Southwest in 2019, and each went live in 2020, Southwest and Sabre were gridlocked. Public pronouncements from Southwest last summer, reiterated in the fall, offered little hope of a breakthrough.

“We hope that cool heads will prevail and that a resolution can happen,” American Express Global Business Travel chief revenue officer Michael Qualantone told The Beat last month, unsure they would.

Yet, hours before the ball dropped on a lightly populated Times Square, Sabre and Southwest announced a big New Year’s resolution.

“Some of our statements earlier in [2020] were pretty direct on this,” Southwest Business vice president Dave Harvey told The Beat this month. “We didn’t really see a path forward, and we shared that with the market back in July. There wasn’t a whole lot of change in that. Clearly, things materialized in the 11th hour, where there was a window to get something done.”

Harvey credited the deal to the give-and-take and mutual compromise of negotiations, and to involvement from the upper reaches of Sabre Travel Solutions and Southwest, as respective chief commercial officers Roshan Mendis and Andrew Watterson were “critical at the end to get the deal done.”

Inked and announced on Dec. 31, Sabre and Southwest’s full-participation agreement will bring Sabre subscribers the content and functionality available to users of Amadeus and Travelport.

“It is along the same lines as the agreements that we signed with Travelport and Amadeus, where they are full-participation, industry-standard agreements that will allow for ARC settlement and increase the capabilities for Sabre agents from the [basic-booking request] experience, so that they have full functionality at their fingertips,” said Southwest senior director of B2B strategy and services Rob Brown. “They’ll also have last-seat availability and the ability to add in our ancillary Early Bird offering.”

It’s a step up from the functionally light basic-booking request model Sabre and Southwest first deployed in the 1990s.

In a memo to agencies, Sabre said the arrangement with Southwest is a “multi-year” deal that



“The good news is, we’re very familiar with each other and our systems, so there shouldn’t be a lot of time that’s needed to at least get started, but the real work will begin once we go deeper into the increased level of participation and some of the additional capabilities we’ll have.”

—SOUTHWEST’S ROB BROWN

will bring Sabre subscribers an upgrade from basic-booking, offering “richer capabilities, improved schedule and inventory accuracy, last seat availability and real-time booking functionality.”

Sabre’s memo stated it would “be rolling out this newly enhanced connectivity in Q2 2021,” with further details to come.

Harvey wasn’t ready to commit to precise timing beyond noting that Southwest’s full participation in Sabre would come online this year.

“The fact that we had not seen a path forward [means] we didn’t allocate the technology resources or manpower to get this thing going on a dime,” Harvey said early this month. “There is a lot of work that has to be done starting this week to even figure out how it fits in the overall tech plan.”

That includes “finding the resources and putting together a workable implementation plan,” added Harvey. “Both sides are very eager to bring this to market for mutual customers as fast as we possibly can, but you just don’t know what you don’t know, so we’ve got to give our delivery teams and tech teams a little bit of time to work out those details.”

Brown said both sides were assembling implementation teams to get moving. “The good news is, we’re very familiar with each other and our systems, so there shouldn’t be a lot of time that’s needed to at least get started, but the real work will begin once we go deeper into the increased level of participation and some of the additional capabilities we’ll have,” he said.

In the meantime, the deal salvages their basic-booking request distribution model, set for sunset at the New Year, but now serving as “the bridge until we go to full participation,” said Harvey.

In the run-up to the agreement, users of Sabre’s GetThere corporate booking tool faced their own Southwest content complication after AgentWare folded in October. AgentWare had enabled Southwest’s API content in GetThere, and a couple of TMCs speaking with The Beat late last year said its cessation coupled with the looming termination of basic-booking participation put them in a bind.

In a memo last month, Sabre said GetThere “customers can elect to access Southwest Airlines content through the Sabre GDS,” but at the time there was no deal for the New Year.

One TMC source, asking not to be identified, was looking to migrate GetThere users who relied on AgentWare to Travelport for Southwest access, as the TMC saw Southwest availability by way of the Sabre basic-booking request model fade for post-December bookings. The Southwest-Sabre deal put the brakes on the agency’s migration.

“We’re fortunate that we hadn’t pulled the plug and decommissioned BBR fully,” Harvey said. “We had started taking steps but hadn’t gone past the point of no return. When the ink had dried on [Dec. 31], we immediately pivoted and reinstated the inventory from Jan. 1 forward. All that happened before the ball dropped at midnight.”

GDS Content Gaps Closing, But Remain
Since Southwest first turned on full GDS participation, starting with Travelport in spring 2020,

Harvey said Southwest has closed some content gaps between the GDS channel and the carrier's website, but not all of them.

Leisure-oriented promotional fare sales are not included in GDSs. There are advance-purchase carve-outs as well.

"We had a big pivot back in May [2020] where we went from less than 40 percent of our content to more than 90 percent" available in GDSs, according to Harvey. "We've got all of our content inside two weeks [in the GDS]. I think it took a little bit of time for the agency community to get comfortable with that. People are always going to compare to what's going on with dot-com, but a lot of that has really died down, and a lot of agencies have gotten comfortable with the content that's flowing directly through their GDS of choice."

Amex GBT had been running audits and checks on Southwest content available through the GDSs and the carrier's website, said Qualantone.

"When Southwest fares first went into Travelport, 90 percent of their fares were cheaper through their website than they were in Travelport in the Wanna Get Away category," said Qualantone, referring to Southwest's lower-tier, nonrefundable fare brand. "That was a major issue. Over time, they've closed that."

The gaps haven't closed entirely. Qualantone said there remains a content advantage in Southwest's direct channels for advance-purchase fares

beyond 14 days out. "There's still a time-to-travel issue that we're seeing on full fare availability," said Qualantone.

In addition to the three GDSs, Southwest continues to support the Swabiz booking portal and its application programming interface connection for business clients to access its content. These offer fuller content than the GDSs.

"We do have a lot of customers, agencies and buyers, [for which] Swabiz and our API work great," said Harvey. "We're not going to pull the rug from under them. Going to those channels, they're going to continue to get full content. If their channel of choice is one of the three GDSs, they're going to have this slightly carved-out content offering."

AmTrav has the option to take Southwest's content via its GDS partner, Travelport, but CEO Jeff Klee told The Beat last month that the travel management company continues to source Southwest through an API connection. "We've considered at some point potentially moving it to the GDS," said Klee. "It's not a huge priority for us. The advantage of doing that is it would be economically better because we'd get some segment incentives."

The disadvantage?

"From a customer standpoint, the GDS content is pretty good," according to Klee. "There's still some gaps, some fares that the API has that the GDSs don't." ■

The Beat

BTNGROUP

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



Thomas L. Kemp
Chairman & Chief Executive Officer

Lisa Cohen
Chief Financial Officer

Robert G. Sullivan
President, Travel Group

David Blansfield
Executive Vice President & Group Publisher

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Ankeet Patel
Senior Vice President, Technology

Sheila Rice
Senior Vice President,
Information Products Group

Elizabeth Koesser
Vice President, Database Products

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

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BTNG Group Editorial & Sales Offices • 116 W. 32nd St., 14th Floor,
New York, NY 10001 • www.businesstravelnews.com

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Carbon Emissions Tracking and Mitigation Services

Despite the immediate attention demanded by the Covid-19 pandemic, the corporate travel sector has maintained its focus on long-term environmental sustainability. In fact, the slowdown in corporate travel activity due to the pandemic has offered an unprecedented opportunity for travel managers to develop new strategies to meet sustainability goals. To aid in those efforts, several providers recently have rolled out services designed to measure—and mitigate—carbon emissions from corporate travel. Those tools take a variety of forms, including Egencia’s emissions data hub, American Express GBT’s Neo OBT sustainability filters and Thrust Carbon’s dedicated emissions tracking platform. BTN compares those three offerings here.

	Egencia emissions data hub	Neo OBT filters	Thrust Carbon platform
Booking types	Air, Hotel	Air, Rail, Hotel	Air, Rail, Hotel, Serviced apartment
Emissions data sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> U.K. DEFRA (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DEFRA DEME (Agence de l’environnement et de la maitrise de l’énergie) in France U.S. EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DEFRA EPA United Nations International Civil Aviation Organization
How often is data updated?	When available from data sources; generally annually	When available from data sources; generally annually.	As available from sources. Regularly seeking new sources/data points.
Global markets covered	EMEA, APAC, North America	All	All
Emissions data integrated into booking flow?	No, carbon emissions data and internal corporate carbon footprint data presented in data hub for completed trips.	Yes, and recently increased prominence of emissions data display in search results.	No
Search results sortable by lowest emissions?	N/A	Yes	N/A
Data reporting on client emissions?	Yes. Air reporting on carbon emission, number of travelers, total ticket expense, mileage and segments. For hotel, reporting on total carbon emission, number of travelers, total spend, hotel nights and transaction count.	Yes. Reports can be automated on a scheduled basis or pulled ad hoc and on demand.	Yes. Automated reports offered to direct clients and a white-label solution for TMC partners. Customizable and detailed enterprise dashboards and reporting also available.
Can clients customize emissions level targets?	No	Yes. Filters can be set to identify levels per trip. Upcoming plans to integrate emissions policy goals into search and increase prominence of compliant booking options in search results.	Yes. Carbon budgeting tool enables clients to set targets and track and evaluate booking behavior.
Consulting/advisory services to help clients set and achieve emissions goals?	Yes, range of advisory services.	Yes. GBT offers range of consultancy services and tools for setting emissions goals and carbon offsetting.	Yes. Advisory solutions to help clients create and set goals, timeframes and strategies and adjust travel policies to support emissions goals.
Carbon offsetting opportunities offered	Yes. Offset options presented via Egencia partners Carbon Neutral Group and Atmosfair, with recommendations for options with regional and local relevance.	Clients can purchase offsets on preferred terms from non-profit organizations. Working to integrate offset information display into the Neo user interface.	Clients can load pre-existing and bespoke offset projects into database. Most geographically relevant offsets displayed to increase engagement and appeal.
Integration with clients’ other systems/third-party tools	No direct integrations.	Exploring data integration with carbon offset providers.	Fully open suite of APIs for clients and third parties to integrate. Pursuing partnerships to support direct integrations.
Other sustainability features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data visualization tools Emissions trend tracking Companywide, department and individual analyses Carbon tax calculator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Green hotel badging for hotel search results Flags for electric and hybrid cars in car rental search 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustainability dashboards and reporting Point of booking and in-trip sustainability messaging Carbon tax advisory
Additional sustainability features planned	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data for rail travel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flags for greenest transportation options Electric and hybrid car policy integration and recommendation algorithm Integrated travel policies for carbon emissions Visualization of carbon offset costs directly in booking flow Additional data sources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> API integrations with OBT partners currently in discussion Third-party integrations and partnerships Further improvements to standard platform functionality

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Being Business Travel News rebranded to Business Travel News Europe (BTN Europe). The new look features a refreshed brand identity, a new logo, and a new website. BTN Europe will continue to be a for weekly magazine, and will complement other titles within the BTN Group, including Business Travel News, Travel Procurement and The Beat, as well as weekly regional UK, events. The Business Travel News, Travel Procurement Europe and The Beat show. BTN Europe will serve both the UK and European corporate travel market, and later this year launch a new series of award-winning professional events. A new website, businessandtravelnews.com, has also launched, incorporating BTN content across the regional and national sites, as well as content from Business Travel News International, which BTN acquired along with The Business Travel News. Following rebranding the new content will be available to both of these websites as well as being available to both.

Elizabeth New, BTN Group's editorial director, said: "Business Travel News is excited to merge two of the most respected content sources in the UK market and to have the opportunity to expand our reach. Emotionally, these two groups had to engage with our English, Dutch, French, German, Italian and Spanish colleagues and beyond. But our focus is also looking at how we can diversify our editorial and content products in Europe and make them so for your specific needs. If we do our job right, we can help you to make your job right - sharing market intelligence, industry engagement and leading-edge innovation in travel management."

"BTN's growth also leads us to see how we can improve our content, and I look forward to offering more research and editorial content to our long-standing audience."

Michelle Brown, BTN Europe digital editor, added: "We really couldn't have what the future holds for us but we're part of the BTN Group. We have to make plans - we're in a tough market of the best industry."

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