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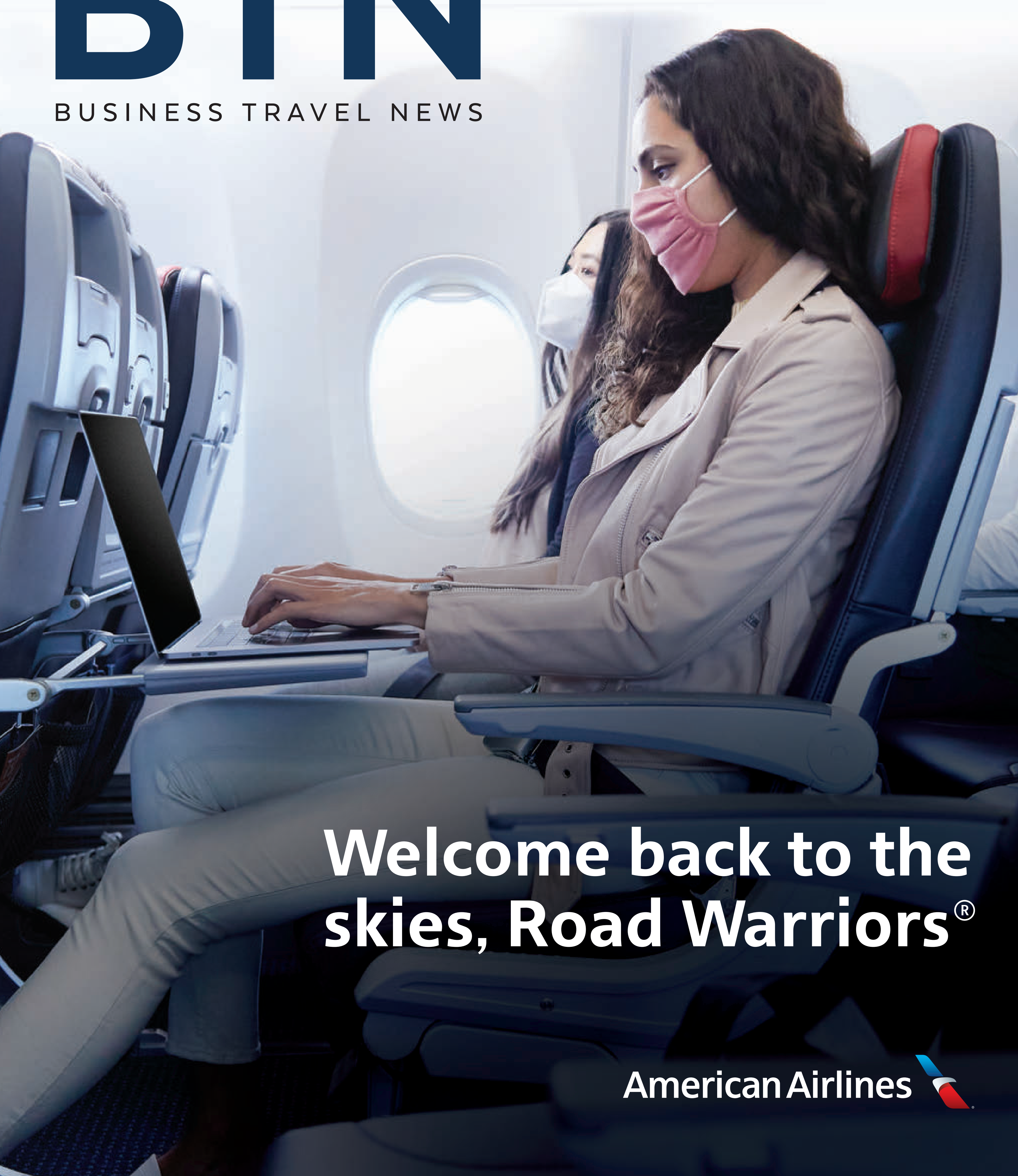
BUSINESS TRAVEL NEWS



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ON THE HORIZON

Concur founder and former CEO Steve Singh helps roll out Spotnana, a new corporate travel tech startup with big names and big plans.

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TRANSPORTATION

Former Ford Motor Co. chief executive Mark Fields joins Hertz as interim CEO as part of a post-bankruptcy shakeup.

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VOICES

The corporate travel industry can lead in supporting physical and neuro-diverse travelers, says Fox World Travel's George Kalka.

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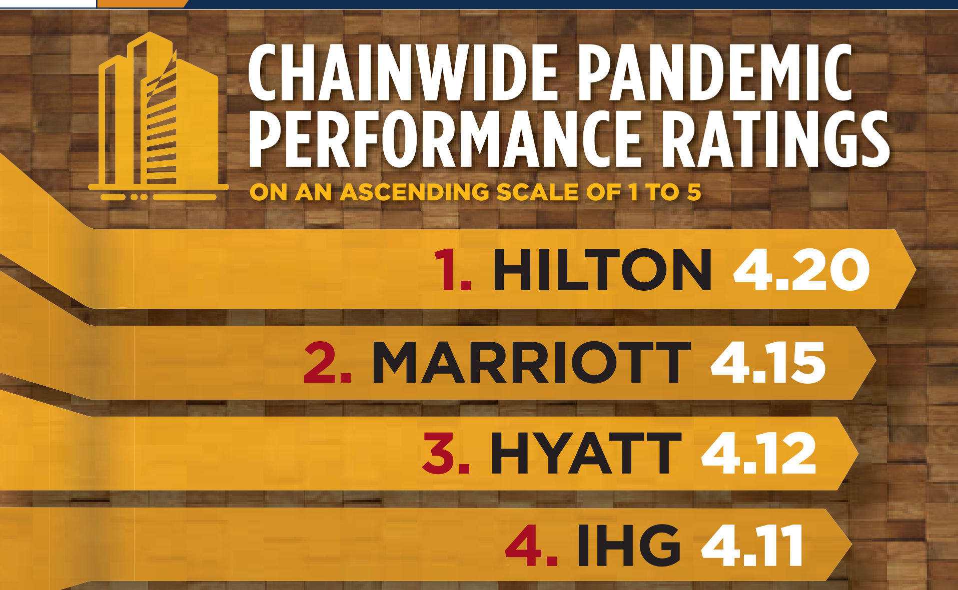
TOP STORY



Source: BTN 2021 Hotel Survey, 138 respondents

BY DONNA M. AIROLDI

BTN'S 2021 ANNUAL HOTEL SURVEY

Uncertainty Still Reigns

The 2021 edition of BTN's annual Hotel Survey differs significantly from its traditional coverage. Given the lack of business travel this year due to the pandemic, this edition's focus is not on individual hotel brand performance. Instead, the survey includes ratings on a chainwide level only, and on just four Covid-19-related attributes. BTN also surveyed travel buyers as to the state and future of their hotel programs, and found a desire to move past the pandemic, back to a world of negotiated contracts and widely available amenities. But in interviews with buyers, hotel executives and consultants, it's clear that persistent labor shortages, shifting sourcing strategies, uneven tier performance and the lack of anything like a complete picture of future demand have changed the hotel landscape since the pre-Covid era, leaving a full return to normalcy still in the distance.

FULL STORY ON PAGE 6

TMC PREPS PREPACKAGED CHAPTER 11 FILING

CWT's CEO Leans Into Recapitalization, Recovery

Travel management company CWT is preparing a 'prepackaged' Chapter 11 bankruptcy filing in the United States to push through a recently announced financial restructuring plan.

The TMC said it is taking steps to implement its previously announced agreement with its financial partners "that will significantly strengthen our financial position, provide substantial liquidity and reduce our debt by approximately 50 percent."

CWT CEO Michelle McKinney Frymire talks:

- CWT's recapitalization
- The Carlsons' exit
- CWT's recovery paradigms

The recapitalization plan would bring down its debt load by nearly $900 million and provide nearly $350 million in new equity financing, according to CWT.

CWT in a statement said: "We plan to use a 'pre-packaged' court-supervised process to implement the agreement on an expedited basis in the coming weeks while we continue operating normally. We look forward to moving ahead as a fundamentally stronger [business].

"We already have overwhelming support for the agreement from our financial stakeholders representing 100 percent of our bank group and holders of over 90 percent of our outstanding secured debt."

BTN Group editorial director Elizabeth West interviewed CEO Michelle McKinney Frymire

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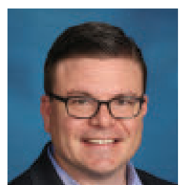
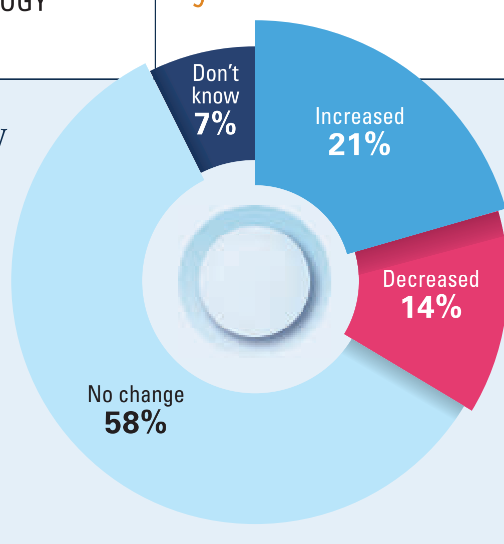


American Airlines' Neil Geurin (pictured) and Amadeus' Ludo Verheggen discuss each supplier's NDC progress.

"We look at what we're doing with Amadeus and with NDC in general as the foundation for how this is going to work for the next 10, 15 or 20 years in all likelihood."

6 | Hotel Survey

Use of Extended-Stay Hotels



Source: BTN 2021 Hotel Survey, 125 respondents

Big Names, Big Aims: Startup Spotnana Debuts

BY ADAM PERROTTA

Corporate travel startup Spotnana has emerged from stealth mode with the backing of some major industry players, and the company is touting equally major plans to shake up the sector.

The brainchild of WTMC founder Sarosh Waghmar, Spotnana can act as a full travel management company for direct corporate clients, but also is offering its technology platform to support the operations of other TMCs and suppliers, in an arrangement the company likened to acting as an Amazon Web Services for the corporate travel industry.

Among the boldface names involved in the New York-headquartered venture are Concur co-founder Steve Singh, who serves as Spotnana chairman and is an investor in the company, along with veteran corporate travel innovator Johnny Thorsen in the role of vice president of partnerships. Former Concur sales chief Bill Tillman will head Spotnana's efforts in that area, while onetime American Express Global Business Travel COO Bill Brindle will serve as its vice president of travel operations

In an interview with BTN, Singh said he had expected not to return to the travel sector after leaving SAP Concur in 2017 but was "reinvigorated" by Waghmar's vision for Spotnana, which centers on uniting various aspects of the travel process that traditionally had been fragmented among disparate tech stacks and controlled by multiple stakeholders with various motivations and incentives.

"Everything from the GDS layer, to the mid-office … it's all very fragmented. They have different customer records, they have different motivations," said Singh. "Various TMCs have motivations to only deliver the content that they want to preference, as opposed to what the customer wants," he added.

Spotnana aims to bring harmony to those competing priorities by leveraging the current generation of cloud-based network technology, offering what Singh described as a "full range of functionality a customer needs, that integrates content from any source, but yet is also configurable."

Looking for Clients Who Share a Vision

That configurability is key to Spotnana's use case as tech architecture underpinning the operations of third-party TMCs and other suppliers, who can customize the platform to their own specific needs and add value tailored for their own target audience via the system's open-API model, Singh noted. For instance, an air carrier can build a more robust content display than is available in the GDS atop Spotnana's platform, he added.

"We want to set the bar of what the customer experience ought to be. You should deliver to the customer the full range of choice that customer is entitled to … and align to how customers want to consume technology."

—SPOTNANA'S STEVE SINGH

The company currently has two travel management company partners and is working with several others, and will launch with multiple partners across the expense, HR and duty-of-care verticals.

While the platform-based service model is a key aspect of Spotnana's overall value proposition, the company is equally focused on bundling that tech into a full TMC service offering for direct corporate clients—of which currently it has about 50 of various sizes—in order to serve as a model for how cutting-edge technology can provide a superior offering for clients, according to Singh.

"We want to set the bar of what the customer experience ought to be," said Singh. "You should deliver to the customer the full range of choice that customer is entitled to … and align to how customers want to consume technology."

As Spotnana sees it, that means offering a full range of booking content from multiple sources on a global scale, offered via a pay-per-use model as opposed to a subscription fee. And while the company declined to disclose its per-trip cost, Singh said Spotnana would leverage the cost-effectiveness of its cloud-based tech stack and pass those savings along to customers.

Waghmar is no stranger to shaking up existing travel industry frameworks. His previous venture, WTMC, was largely built upon the premise of upending the model of GDSs using financial incentives to drive TMCs to book volume through their channels, even if the content available in that channel was not the best option for the client.

WTMC has ceased operations, with some of its key clients moving on to relationships with major TMCs. But that anti-status quo ethos still runs through Spotnana's veins as well, Waghmar told BTN.

"It's not just time to change the technology, it's even time to change the entire business model," Waghmar noted—citing the reduced costs of cloud computing and advances in artificial intelligence and machine learning as the key factors that allow for Spotnana to offer an alternative to the legacy infrastructure he said has hindered efficiency and misaligned priorities throughout the travel ecosystem.

Investors Back Next-Gen Travel Tech

At the moment, Spotnana has "around 120" employees, Waghmar said, with the majority in development roles as the company continues to build out its platform, along with a growing sales and marketing team.

As for funding, Singh's Madrona Venture Group recently joined with ICONIQ Capital to lead a $34 million Series A round.

"I'm incredibly pleased to work with an entrepreneur like Sarosh," said Singh. "He has experience in the travel industry, but also is a great technologist. You can't just be a technologist and you can't just be a travel executive. You have to understand both domains, and that's how you bring value to the customer."

— *Elizabeth West contributed to this report.*

Amadeus: Bundles, Adoption Propel NDC Progress

Amadeus this month published a report dubbing 2021 as "the year of scaling" for the International Air Transport Association's New Distribution Capability standard, citing airlines' development and release of bundles and travel management companies going live with NDC content. Amadeus director of global air content acceleration Ludo Verheggen, along with American Airlines director of distribution strategy Neil Geurin, recently spoke with BTN executive editor Michael B. Baker about the progress each has made with NDC and what to expect when IATA releases its newest schema for the standard. An edited transcript follows, read the full interview at businesstravelnews.com.

Amadeus' Ludo Verheggen (top) and American Airlines' Neil Geurin discuss:

- Progress toward NDC critical mass
- More standardization with a new schema
- The NDC status of TMCs

HOW HAS PROGRESS WITH NDC ADVANCED DURING THE PANDEMIC?

Ludo Verheggen: We're 100 percent committed to drive NDC forward together with our partners in collaborating with the whole industry. We're very excited where we are today. With American, we started the rollout of NDC worldwide at the beginning of this year, and we're already live in 50 markets around the world. Over the next few months, we'll be going live in all of the Americas. By the end of this year, we will make sure the whole Amadeus travel agency community can at least get access to the NDC content so they can start making their first steps as well. The more of us who start making the first steps, the more we can really bring this to the volume that we like to see and rebuild travel in a better way thanks to that technology.

Neil Geurin: We are spending a lot of time getting ready for our corporate customers to come back, starting late this year or early next year. What I've been focused on in the distribution space for the last five years is to get to the point where we never have to talk about NDC anymore, because it's just distribution. It finally feels like, thanks in a huge part to the work Amadeus has done, that 2022 will be the year where we don't have to talk about NDC anymore. It's just the content that customers want, and it's available to them in their channels. After that, what we talk about is product. We are now finally on that path.

DID THE PANDEMIC ALTER YOUR COURSE?

Geurin: It's been an unusual last year and a half for us, but we've all had an opportunity to take some of this time and get ready for corporate travel, which is going to come back. We look at what we're doing with Amadeus and with NDC in general as the foundation for how this is going to work for the next 10, 15 or 20 years in all likelihood. We announced earlier this year a few NDC-driven products, Main Plus being the most notable of those, a product available for a customer so they can get access to a slightly better seat in the coach cabin, preferred boarding and an extra bag. The idea as a test was that we have corporate customers who today are buying all of those things in disparate ways, jumping through hoops to do that. What if we put it all together and made it really easy for them to transact with? We are big believers in testing and learning, and this year, running that out to see how it would go and work through the process of bringing this into new channels every day, coming very soon to Amadeus as well. We found it's an incredibly popular product. We sell a ton of it, so we're really happy with how it's gone through the first year.

WHAT WILL THE UPCOMING NEW SCHEMA FOR NDC FROM IATA MEAN FOR PROGRESS?

Verheggen: What we all need to be conscious of is that we've been learning over the last few years in our NDC journey. A lot of airlines started their NDC journey in the 2017 version, others started in 2018 or 2019. Many of them started at a different point and with a different version, which has created clear differences in the way they were implemented and interpreted by the airlines or IT providers behind it. With the new version, 21.3, all these learnings from the last four years are being used to create a newer, more complete and clearer version with clearer guidelines of how it should be implemented.

WHERE ARE YOUR TMC PARTNERS ON THIS JOURNEY RIGHT NOW?

Verheggen: Within our NDC-X program, we've been working closely with all the large global travel management companies from the beginning, so it's been great to see the progress that has been made in that space over the last few years. For travel management companies, NDC is bringing the biggest change, because the whole TMC environment and ecosystem is very tightly integrated with the GDS world and all the processes the GDSs have been developing over the last 30-odd years, with the EDIFACT standards. That means for a TMC to become really efficient with NDC and be able to give the same level of service all the corporate customers are used to, it's a huge undertaking for them. It was great to see they joined the journey from the beginning and especially was exciting that we are piloting with pretty much all of them, and all of them are really gearing up to be NDC-ready by the end of the year.

Geurin: If we do our job well here and develop products and services that customers like and appreciate, that means they'll be more satisfied, which should lead to the whole ecosystem being happier, healthier and better partners going forward. We open up new opportunities for partnerships between travel management companies and airlines, between travel management companies and booking tools and between travel management companies and their global distribution system partners.

BTN's 2021 HOTEL SURVEY

Hilton Takes Top Honors

BY DONNA M. AIROLDI

The 2021 edition of BTN's annual Hotel Report differs significantly from its traditional coverage. This edition's focus is not on brand performance, as there was too little business travel that took place the past 12 months, and some buyers did not feel comfortable rating brands when booking volumes were so low. Instead, the survey includes ratings on a chainwide level only, and on just four Covid-19-related attributes.

Hilton Worldwide earned the top spot among corporate travel buyers, followed by Marriott International, Hyatt Hotels Corp. and IHG Hotels & Resorts, all within a couple hundredths of a point from each other. BWH Hotel Group and Accor, while not making the final cut due to lower usage rates among survey participants, were close behind, and performed well in certain categories.

The survey asked travel buyers to rate chains on their overall Covid-19 response in implementing health and safety plans—the attribute in which all the hotel companies scored their highest marks—effective client communications during the pandemic, corporate contracting management, and their ability to maintain operational properties in key business locations. **Hilton** garnered the highest marks for two of the four: its Covid-19 response and ability to maintain operations.

"We are really proud of the work we did," said Hilton SVP of worldwide sales Frank Passanante. With Hilton CleanStay, its cleanliness and safety program, "we took what was foundationally very high standards and elevated them throughout the entire stay," he said. "Flexibility, cleanliness, these are the things customers told us they needed us to focus on."

For maintaining operations, Passanante said Hilton looked to its properties in China to get an early perspective on the effect Covid-19 had on the business and to gain insights to manage through the crisis. "It required us to evolve how we managed our hotels," he said, adding that engagement and communication with key accounts was important. "One thing we were able to do was shift resources internally to where the needs were."

An example of how Hilton did that was the deployment of its catastrophic task force. "As crises unfolded, new needs emerged," Passanante said. "We moved resources, doubling down on how we supported catastrophic events. We always had a desk, but we more than doubled that and followed the globe to make sure there was continuity in how we serviced that. It became a 24/7 response team to help with anything that came up, whether weather-related [such as a hurricane] or other crisis."

Marriott took top marks for effective client communications during the pandemic and second for its overall pandemic response. The company's SVP of global sales, Tammy Routh, said that staying in contact with every customer made the difference, even though the company had significantly reduced its workforce. "People that formerly handled five accounts now handled 20," she said. "The direction I gave them was, 'Every day you come into the office, the No. 1 priority is to stay in contact with your customers.' "

Routh said Marriott did that in two ways. First, the company checked in on customers personally. "We were all dealing with this, and I didn't want them to think we called only when asking for business," she said.

CHAINWIDE PERFORMANCE
ON A SCALE FROM 1 TO 5

	Hilton	Marriott	Hyatt	IHG	TOTAL
Overall Covid-19 response in implementing health and safety plans	**4.48**	4.41	4.36	4.24	4.37
Effective client communication during the pandemic	4.07	**4.10**	4.01	3.99	4.04
Corporate contracting management	3.99	3.94	4.01	**4.07**	4.00
Ability to maintain operational properties in key business locations	**4.28**	4.16	4.10	4.13	4.17
TOTAL	4.20	4.15	4.12	4.11	4.15

METHODOLOGY: BTN emailed audience members responsible for corporate hotel buying decisions, and 138 participated Aug. 10-Sept. 17 in an online survey to rate hotel chain pandemic performance during the previous 12 months. Buyers rated only the chains with which they have conducted business or hold a corporate contract on four pandemic-related attributes on an ascending scale from one to five. Only chains with multiple brands were considered for this survey, and BTN reported results only for chains with significant respondent usage. BTN also surveyed respondents about the evolution of their hotel program practices over the past 12 months as well as their go-forward strategies.

The second was to stay apprised of clients' stances on travel policies, return to office, and group and meeting philosophies. "We took that information and then made decisions based on the customer voice. We kept the dialogue going weekly, in some cases more, so the customer felt that their voice mattered."

Best Western also scored well on its pandemic response, and SVP and CMO Dorothy Dowling credited the company's longtime commitment through its "I Care Clean" program, launched in 2012. "We created a foundational program and started deconstructing the guest room and public spaces and really looked at where the high-touch levels were from a customer point of view. … We created a cultural shift in the commitment to cleanliness," she said. Once the pandemic hit, the company evolved the program further into "We Care Clean," with an even more elevated level of cleaning protocols, and the sales team focused on communicating that to the buyer community.

For **Accor**, which according to SVP of sales and distribution Markus Keller is the largest hotel operator in every geography except North America and China, communications during the pandemic "came with challenges and opportunities," he said, adding that the company was able to implement its All Safe hygiene and safety standards in more than 4,900 hotels worldwide, despite geographical dispersion. In communicating those protocols, "in the early part of the crisis, we had direct one-to-one communications with key customers, and wrote letters explaining what we were doing," Keller said. "We conducted tens of thousands of phone calls, from headquarters as well as in each region to their respective client bases. We switched a lot of our sales activities to virtual. … We shared what we were doing and how we were reopening hotels. We also shared not only information about ourselves but also what we observed globally in the markets where we were present, and that was something that [clients] appreciated as well."

IHG outscored its competitors for corporate contracting management. "We've focused on being nimble and responding to the needs of our customers throughout the pandemic," said IHG SVP of global sales Derek DeCross in an email. "We extended rates and discounts from 2021 into 2022 to maintain flexibility for our customers who are still uncertain about travel programs and budgets. We also implemented dynamically priced products to provide customers with confidence that they had access to a market-appropriate rate. This has been a bright spot for both buyers and suppliers given resource and demand constraints. As a result, we've seen an increase in adoption of dynamic rates across corporate verticals, particularly in finance, retail and construction/engineering."

Contracting was the one category where both Hilton and Marriott scored below Hyatt and IHG. "One thing we have heard loud and clear from customers is we need rate assurance," Hilton's Passanante said. "There are many unanswered questions on markets and the volatility of some markets. 2020 proved that dynamic pricing models did provide a benefit to customers. We are focused on providing rate assurance, and dynamic is a key part of that answer. And delivering greater efficiency in what we know is a tedious and challenging [request-for-proposals] process, and resources across the board are more constrained than ever. We are trying to listen and respond and get it right."

Marriott once again offered to roll over rates into 2022, and many buyers took that offer, according to the company. But some buyers noted that Marriott wasn't willing to negotiate RFPs this season. Routh countered that the company "will always sell the way the customer wants to buy," she said. "We weren't sure what the right thing to do was for the pricing season, and we spent time with the revenue management teams trying to figure out how to put forward something where everybody wins. And travel buyers really do not know how much travel they will have. Our analysis and numbers prove that rolling over rates with rate protection is a winning value proposition for all parties. And we would never want buyers to be in the position where the retail rate is better. … If a customer wanted a full RFP, of course we would honor that."

Hyatt was the only company to score above a four in all four of the attributes rated, with its top score for its Covid-19 response. "It was everything we implemented, including hygiene managers on staff at every property," said Hyatt VP of global sales for the Americas Gus Vonderheide. "We will continue to work with outside organizations to audit the properties on a regular basis, because we feel strongly that we could not do that ourselves. That's not going away in 2022. As business travel returns, it will be even more important than a year ago to show we are still living and breathing the standards we set."

Vonderheide added that "it's easy to say, 'let's get back to normal,' but travelers will still be at different levels of comfort. Some were ready a year ago. Some might not be for another year. We need to talk to all of them. … We immediately believed that flexibility and creativity would be key to getting through this." The company offered different pricing models and contract opportunities that "we felt would be a good variety or a large enough variety to appeal to the masses," he said. "Over the past year and a half, I'm very proud of the comments we've heard from customers. It's not a seller's or buyer's market; it's a partner's market. If ever there was a time to benefit from strongly being together, this is it."

Ext. Stay, Economy Led Pandemic, But Field Leveling Off

BY DONNA M. AIROLDI

Compared with traditional hotel segments, the extended-stay segment performed well throughout the depths of the Covid-19 pandemic, even though the comparisons are not exact. The type of essential travelers who remained on the road and some leisure guests who began traveling again a year ago often desired longer stays, wanted kitchens as many restaurants in and near hotels had closed or had limited services, and sought extra space for working or simply spreading out.

Extended Stay America capitalized on its pandemic success and agreed in March 2021 to be sold for about $6 billion, taking the company private. Choice Hotels, which now counts four extended-stay brands in its portfolio, has leaned into the segment, which as of June 30 accounted for 10 percent of the company's domestic rooms. Its WoodSpring Suites brand reported occupancy levels at nearly 86 percent and 16 percent revenue-per-available-room growth during the second quarter of 2021 compared with the same period in 2019. In development activity for the period, Choice's franchise contracts for the segment grew nearly 60 percent.

Economy extended-stay in particular year-to-date through Aug. 31, 2021, had surpassed its 2019 levels for all three key performance indicators, according to The Highland Group. The 2021 midscale tier was down mid-single-digit percentages for each metric—RevPAR, occupancy and average daily rate—while the upscale extended-stay segment continued to lag, with occupancy down 9 percent from 2019 levels, ADR off 14.8 percent and RevPAR down 22.5 percent.

As the recovery continues and travelers have become more comfortable with hotel stays in general, the segment's growth has tapered, and its overall performance shows occupancy down 4.3 percent, ADR off 10.9 percent and a RevPAR decline of 14.7 percent compared with 2019 year-to-date metrics.

Traditional Tier Performance

Looking at the same period for the tradi-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 11

Buyers Ready for Post-Covid Service, Amenities and Negotiating

BY DONNA M. AIROLDI

As part of this year's 2021 Hotel Report, BTN surveyed 138 travel buyers as to the state and future of their hotel programs, and found a desire to move past the pandemic, back to a world of negotiated contracts and widely available amenities. But a return to normalcy isn't that simple, and persistent labor shortages have left hotels unable to fully return to a pre-Covid era, and buyers still don't have anywhere near a complete picture of future demand. Still, as the recovery continues, both sides are finding ways to work together to move forward.

2022 RFP Trends, Rate Strategies

Last year, some buyers opted to roll over their negotiated 2020 rates into 2021, given uncertainty about future volume and chain representatives who were operating with fewer resources and doing more work. For the current request-for-proposals season, "the situation appears to have stabilized quite a bit further, and the chains have caught up with some of the processes needed for dual-rate loading and flexibility," said Goldspring Consulting partner Neil Hammond. "There's a little more beyond, 'Here's the rollover, take it or leave it,' " he said, adding that he's seeing more chainwide agreements.

Survey results showed a little more than half of buyers planned to roll over portions of their hotel program portfolios, but also negotiate key partnerships. Slightly more than one in five buyers planned to roll over their entire portfolios, while nearly one in four planned to conduct a full RFP for the 2022 season.

Those results are consistent with what Areka Consulting managing partner Louise Miller has seen. "Some customers are at 40 percent to 50 percent of normal levels and know where they are staying and going and can feel comfortable negotiating," she said. "Others are traveling 10 percent or less [of previous volumes]. They are waiting to see where demand materializes and can practice dynamic program management."

Indeed, nearly 62 percent of buyers reported that they will push more agreements to dynamic rates than in the previous cycle, with about 44 percent planning to use a negotiated corporate rate as a cap for those properties. This increase in using dynamic rates surely would please the hotel companies, many of which have been pushing for them for years.

About 22 percent of buyer respondents planned to concentrate more on static rates and less on dynamic compared with the previous cycle. Just 15 percent were "all-in" on static rates, and about 1 percent were using dynamic only.

Geography also may play a part in rate strategy. "2021 saw a lot of contract rollovers," said Accor SVP of sales and distribution Markus Keller. "People were on furloughs on both the supply and demand sides. But people are coming back to the table and want a discussion on what rates will be. There is a lot less rollover. That is particularly true for North America. Other regions, like Asia-Pacific, are more accepting of the rollover. It's not all in the same place when it comes to the recovery."

Some sources noted that, depending on the company and vertical, hotel programs are generally smaller than pre-pandemic. That could be the case for S&P Global director of global travel and meetings Ann Dery's program. She is holding off on an RFP until after the company completes a merger with IHS Markit, which should happen before the end of the year.

"My strategy is to have a more strategic program," she said. "We'll expand our footprint globally, as IHS Markit has offices in more countries than we do. We are switching hotel consultants and solutions to help with hotel engagements this year. But I don't think we'll need 200 hotels, or multiple hotels in top destinations. We will look at who our top 25 properties are and most likely try to get the top 10 a hybrid rate, then the next tier will be dynamic with a discount and cap."

Dery said it's about making the program fit to the purpose and having a smaller footprint and less properties per destination. "I do think the pandemic has really changed the landscape when it comes to hotel sourcing. It may or may not come back in a few years," she said. "With reshopping tools and better tools to track how often we are getting preferred rates, it's changed the whole dynamic of hotel sourcing."

Supplier and On-Site Challenges

Nearly 57 percent of buyer respondents identified the responsiveness of sales and account management teams as the biggest supplier challenge they faced. This no doubt is related to the many furloughs and layoffs the hotel companies conducted during the height of the pandemic, and the difficulties they have had in rehiring workers.

"Some of the chains did really well, others did not," Dery said. One company "had such a huge amount of people furloughed, and it took so long to bring some staff back that my account has suffered from a lack of attention. We now have a new account manager with [them], but we lost all connection to the former relationships we had."

Hotel companies told BTN they are working hard to bring staff back. "It is getting better every day, every week, getting people back to work," said Marriott International SVP of global sales Tammy Routh. "We're getting to occupancies where we can bring people back and reopen the restaurants, all the facilities."

Hyatt Hotels Corp. is looking to "open doors to new types of people," said Hyatt VP of global sales for the Americas Gus Vonderheide. "We're looking outside of the normal hiring process to recruit talent in ways we have not done in the past, and it's working well." He added that Hyatt also is getting involved earlier with hospitality schools, and not just interviewing candidates during their senior year. "We're getting to know these students earlier on and getting them into the family sooner," he said.

Another concern among buyers was finding market rates lower than their corporate rates, shared by 45 percent of respondents. "If you have dynamic rates and you're rolling over, this won't affect you," said global travel manager Mira Rosenzweig, who is co-chair of the Global Business Travel Association accommodations committee. "Where you have a static rate and don't have a dynamic component in addition, that is where you're running into market rates much less than what you had solidified in the contract."

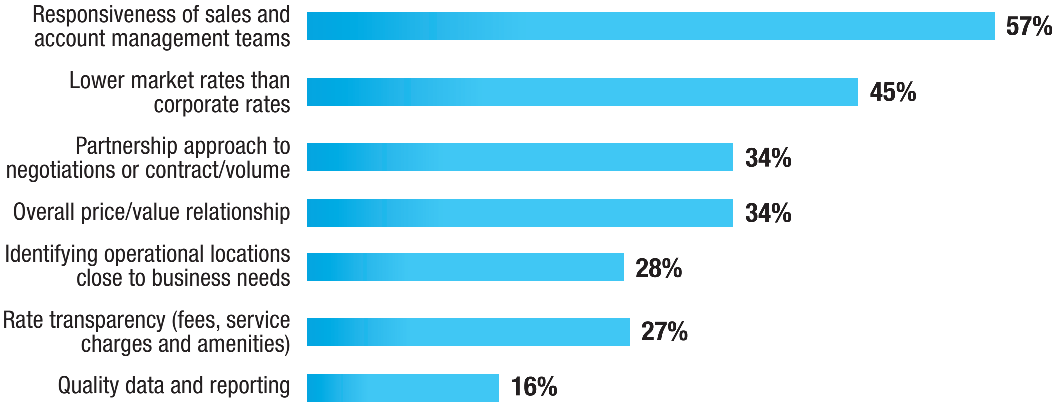
In a somewhat related concern, more than one in three buyers also noted that supplier challenges included a lack of a partnership approach to negotiations and the overall price/value relationship.

By far the biggest in-hotel challenges were the availability of food and beverage options (75 percent) and adequate staffing levels on-site, such as for the front desk

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

SUPPLIER CHALLENGES

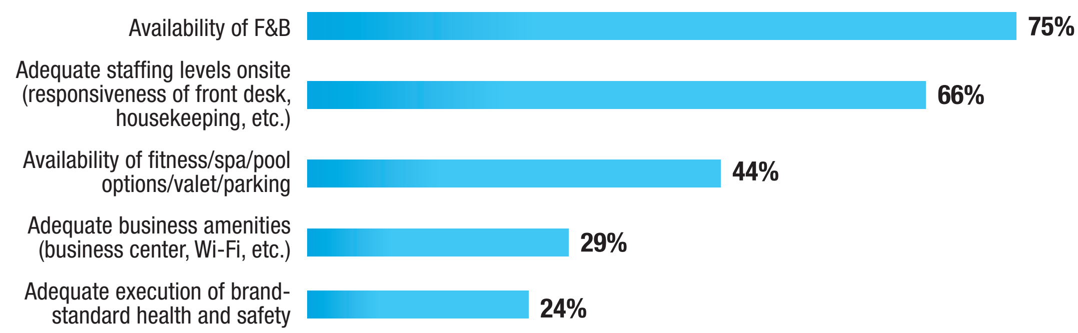
PAST 12 MONTHS



Source: BTN 2021 Hotel Survey, 129 respondents

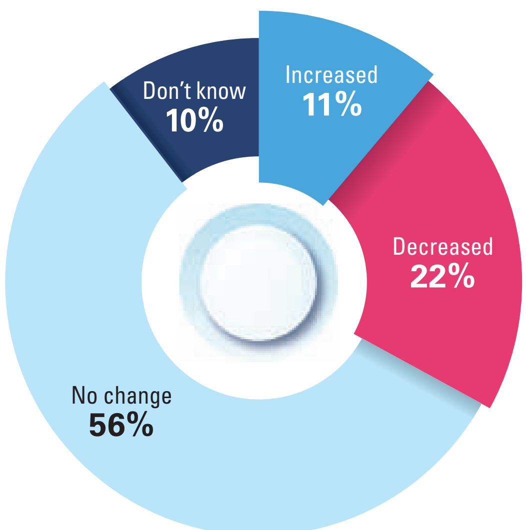
ON-THE-GROUND SERVICE CHALLENGES

PAST 12 MONTHS



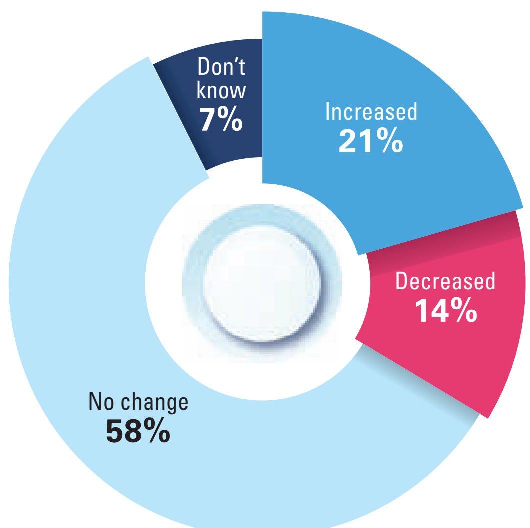
Source: BTN 2021 Hotel Survey, 128 respondents

USE OF SERVICED APARTMENT/ SHORT-TERM RENTALS



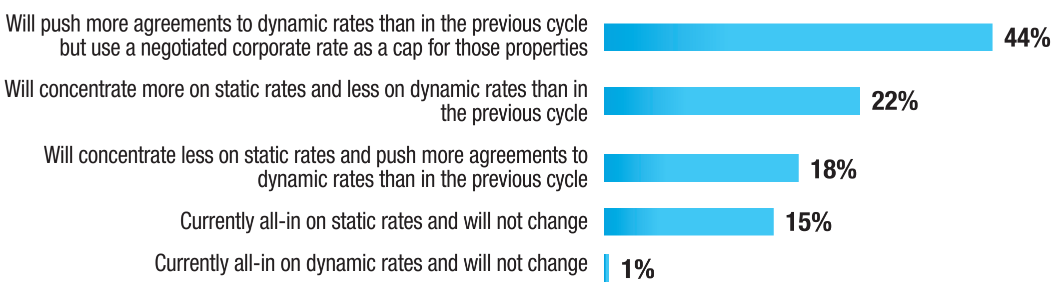
Source: BTN 2021 Hotel Survey, 125 respondents

USE OF EXTENDED-STAY HOTELS



Source: BTN 2021 Hotel Survey, 125 respondents

STATIC RATE NEGOTIATING STRATEGY



Source: BTN 2021 Hotel Survey, 94 respondents

SERVICES & AMENITIES PRIORITIZATION

COMPARED WITH PREVIOUS YEARS

	Higher	Lower	No change	N/A
Cancellation policies	66%	5%	29%	0%
Wi-Fi connectivity	33%	4%	63%	0%
Breakfast	35%	6%	56%	2%
Parking	21%	3%	69%	6%
Fitness facilities and wellness programs	14%	10%	69%	7%
Securing transient rates for meetings	16%	4%	61%	19%
Including employee leisure travel to count toward volume commitments	13%	4%	56%	27%

Source: BTN 2021 Hotel Survey, 94 respondents

HOTEL TIER SHIFTS

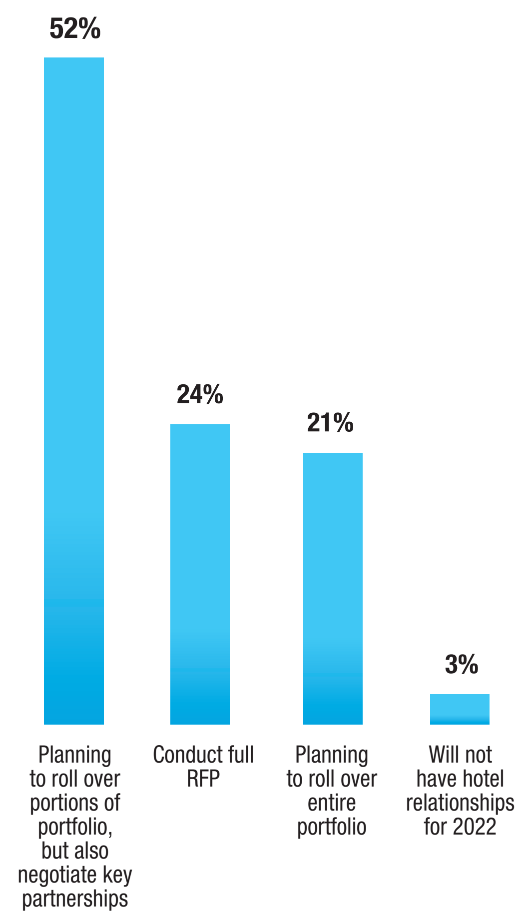
COMPARED WITH 2019

	Higher % of bookings	Lower % of bookings	No change
Luxury	10%	41%	49%
Upper-Upscale	31%	24%	45%
Upscale	35%	16%	49%
Upper-Midscale	28%	22%	50%
Midscale	16%	24%	60%
Economy	5%	33%	62%

Source: BTN 2021 Hotel Survey, 125 respondents

RATE ROLLOVERS

BUYERS' PLANS FOR 2022 RATES



Source: BTN 2021 Hotel Survey, 127 respondents

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and housekeeping (66 percent).

Housekeeping always is a key topic, and most hotel companies plan at least partially to retain an on-demand option, even post-pandemic, especially given the increase in the cost of labor.

"Where some of the challenges happened, there was a disconnect from the information we received and what the experience was on property," said Travelsavers SVP of hotel programs Samantha Jones. She added that some full-service properties couldn't service guests when the restaurants weren't open. "Midscale and economy hotels did better because they always offer free breakfast as a brand standard," she said. For one full-service hotel company that focuses on the corporate traveler, Jones said the experience was inconsistent from hotel to hotel.

"Service is a hot topic, especially when you don't know what you are going to get," Jones said. "We are working with hotels directly to say what is open and what isn't to help us to communicate to our travelers what to expect before they arrive. It's difficult when booking for people who have not traveled for a long time. They are expecting the pre-Covid experience. You have to set expectations with travelers. But some people don't care. They expect what they expect as a paying customer. It's a tricky thing."

Service and Amenity Expectations

Nearly 44 percent of buyers found challenges with the availability of on-site amenities, such as the gym and pool. About 29 percent were concerned about properties having adequate business amenities, such as a business center and Wi-Fi.

When it comes to service and amenity prioritization, 35 percent of buyers said breakfast would be a higher priority for them in 2022 than in previous years. The good news is hotel companies are beginning to bring back fuller breakfast options, including BWH Hotel Group, Marriott and IHG Hotels & Resorts. "Breakfast has one of the biggest impacts on satisfaction scores, and Covid-19-related restrictions made it difficult for our hotels to meet traditional expectations," said IHG SVP of global sales Derek DeCross in an email. "We're working closely with owners to create a range of safe, high-quality solutions for guests that remain cost-effective for our hotels."

A full one-third of respondents said Wi-Fi would be prioritized more for them than previously going forward, while 21 percent noted that parking would be more important. "Standard amenities are still being negotiated," Rosenzweig said, adding that Wi-Fi will always be important, especially as some guests are working from their hotel room. "Parking is an interesting one because rental car usage has increased for some companies that don't want to be using rideshare. Car service has increased as well."

But the top item that buyers identified as having more priority in 2022 than before would be cancellation policies, noted by two-thirds of respondents. "We're seeing more flexibility with cancellation policies," Rosenzweig said. "But I don't know how long that cancellation flexibility will last. Those will come out in the RFP. Two to three years ago, the cancellation policy was more 48 hours. Buyers are pushing for the same day or 24 hours."

Goldspring's Hammond agreed: "Buyers are still holding firm on no erosion on the cancellation period."

Alternative Accommodation Usage

Much ado has been made about how short-term rentals, or apartment-style accommodations, have been a success story during the pandemic. Some leisure travelers now prefer these options for similar reasons extended-stay properties gained in popularity. But what about business travel?

About 56 percent of respondents indicated they would make no change to the use of serviced apartments or short-term rentals in their programs. More than 22 percent said they planned to decrease their usage. Just over 11 percent intended to increase their use in hotel programs. Ten percent were unsure.

Areka's Miller, though, is seeing interest in those options rise. "Especially Airbnb for Work, superhosts and ones that have protections," she said. "I'm definitely seeing more interest in those. The travelers usually drive the choice. Until travelers get back on the road, it's hard to say. But buyers control only so much. Three to four years ago at a conference, buyers were saying, 'We don't allow Airbnb, not at all.' Within a year, there was lots of usage of those because the travelers did it anyway. That will happen again. It's just going to matter what is most convenient for the user."

Increased Tech Use

Mobile keys and contactless check-in and checkout already were growing in popularity prior to the pandemic, but Covid-19 accelerated their acceptance and availability. Accor this year even introduced its first fully digital hotel room in the United Kingdom.

"That hotel uses a number of technologies, and one is the Accor key, which is being deployed into different hotels for keyless entry into guest rooms," said Accor's Keller. "They can get the key in their smartphone and head directly to their room."

Nearly all of Marriott's hotels globally offer mobile check-in through its Bonvoy app, including more than 5,700 hotels in North America, Routh said. About 3,850 hotels in North America offer mobile key. "Globally, we are on track to offer mobile key at more than 5,200 hotels by the end of the year," she added.

In addition to expanding digital check-in and digital key, SVP of worldwide sales Frank Passanante said Hilton Worldwide is expanding in-room technology, enabling guests to use their mobile devices through the Hilton Honors app for certain aspects of their stay, including streaming media. "Those technology-enabled hotels are expanding, and the trajectory is that we will scale that in time," he said.

Contactless payment is another area of focus. Mobile payment is currently available at more than 2,500 Hilton hotels, "where guests can pay with their mobile phones and smart watches by tapping their credit cards," Passanante said.

Room service and F&B ordering also have gone digital in many hotels. "Touchless is absolutely part of the Covid recovery," Hyatt's Vonderheide said. "You can now change the TV with your device, or order room service by downloading a code. We will continue to look for ways to provide a sense of security and safety to customers, and a lot will be through technology."

Accor in October also announced direct booking for its meeting spaces in partnership with Groups360. The company's GroupSync platform will replace Accor's current meetings website for RFPs before year-end. Beginning in 2022, customers will be able to book meeting space in real time using GroupSync Engage, with instant booking for guest rooms integrated in the following months, Keller said. IHG, Hilton and Omni Hotels also added the GroupSync Engage meetings feature earlier this year.

Best Western is in the early stages of some technology programs, said SVP and CMO Dorothy Dowling. "We are very thoughtful with hoteliers in terms of investments to make sure they will represent a long-term solution and be livable in terms of the investment they make," she said.

Sustainability, DE&I Importance

Sustainability and diversity, equity and inclusion topics are increasing in importance to many buyers. "Buyers are extremely interested in understanding those, and there has been more focus from the buyers' side on this," Hammond said. "There certainly has been more information provided on all those issues from the supplier side. Nobody wants to get left behind on either of those topics. It remains to be seen how much those factors will ultimately impact buying decisions."

S&P Global has a supplier diversity initiative underway, focusing on its top 100 suppliers. “Unfortunately, hotels do not fall into that bucket because of the low level of overall spend,” Dery said. “That said, it doesn’t mean we won’t add questions to the RFP to start collecting the data. If we can put an icon on the online booking tool to show a property has a level of DE&I or is using the ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) acronym, it’s worth promoting and great for us to do as well. Companies are being asked by their own supply chains to document ESG, DE&I, and it makes sense in turn they expect clients to do the same. We will have many new and more socially engaged travelers, and they are very focused on these types of social initiatives.”

Cvent Transient partnered with American Express Global Business Travel to add 47 new questions to its RFP tool this year focused on sustainability and DE&I. Rosenzweig said GBTA is working to add new questions to its RFP template around the topics as well. “We expect it to be available for the 2023 RFP season,” she said. “Everyone is coming out with net-zero target dates. Travel is one of the biggest contributors to carbon emissions. How do you control that without shutting down all of your travel?”

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

tional tiers, the story is simiI’llar, with lower-priced segments doing better than higher-priced ones. The economy segment performed the best, with occupancy and RevPAR off just 2.5 percent each compared with 2019 and ADR essentially fully recovered, according to STR.

The midscale segment also has shown a strong recovery. Year-to-date as of Aug. 31, occupancy was at 93.3 percent of 2019 levels, ADR had increased 1.2 percent, and RevPAR was down just 5.5 percent. BWH Hotel Group, whose portfolio is about 60 percent midscale and includes the Best Western brand, has seen RevPAR recover to about 90 percent of 2019 levels year-to-date, and expects a full recovery in 2022. The company’s ADR has fully covered, and occupancy is only about six points behind 2019 levels, according to the company.

The upper-midscale tier has shown a slower but steady recovery, with year-to-date occupancy levels as of Aug. 31 at nearly 61 percent, off 12 percent from the same period in 2019. ADR recovered to nearly 96 percent of its previous level, while RevPAR was still down about 16 percent from 2019 levels.

Throughout the pandemic, upscale, upper-upscale and luxury segments were hit the hardest, not least because those typically cater to business and corporate group travel, which have been slower to recover than leisure. Those segments also saw more hotel closures and partial closures.

The exception is for ADR. Rates in the luxury segment have fully recovered, and as of Aug. 31, had increased 10.6 percent over 2019. Average upper-upscale and upscale rates still were lower than 2019, but just 8.7 percent and 10.2 percent, respectively. Among the three segments, upper-upscale lagged the most, with occupancy down 36.4 percent for the period, and RevPAR off by 41.9 percent.

These three segments are poised for a stronger bounce-back as business travel begins to pick up steam, and group business on the books—especially for 2022—has rebounded, with multiple hotel companies reporting average group rates that meet or exceed those for 2019.

U.S. HOTEL PERFORMANCE BY TIER YEAR-TO-DATE THROUGH AUG. 31, 2021

	Occupancy	Change vs. 2019	ADR	Change vs. 2019	RevPAR	Change vs. 2019
Luxury	49.6%	-31.2%	$335.31	10.6%	$166.30	-24.0%
Upper upscale	47.1%	-36.4%	$172.17	-8.7%	$81.09	-41.9%
Upscale	58.2%	-20.2%	$129.78	-10.2%	$75.57	-28.3%
Upper midscale	60.8%	-12.0%	$112.27	-4.4%	$68.22	-16.0%
Midscale	57.2%	-6.7%	$98.29	1.2%	$56.24	-5.5%
Economy	59.4%	-2.5%	$76.51	-0.1%	$45.47	-2.5%
Extended stay	73.9%	-4.3%	$93.49	-10.9%	$69.13	-14.7%

Sources: STR, The Highland Group

The unknown variable is the return to offices. The hotel industry had been counting on an autumn return to spur increased demand, particularly for the upper tiers. But many companies that planned a September return delayed that by a few months as the delta variant spread and Covid-19 cases rose. Further, in recent weeks, some major companies, such as PwC, announced they would offer employees full-time remote work. It remains to be seen how this will affect business travel hotel demand going forward.

Tier Shift in Hotel Bookings

The 2021 BTN hotel survey found that travel buyers reported shifts in their booking patterns by tiers. Just under 50 percent of buyers reported no change in the share of bookings since 2019 for the luxury, upper-upscale, upscale and upper-midscale segments. The remaining half for each tier, however, showed interesting shifts.

Coinciding with performance metrics, about 41 percent of buyers reported a lower share of bookings for luxury properties since 2019, while just more than 10 percent had a higher percentage for this segment, not surprising considering group business and high-end business travel were nearly at a standstill during much of the pandemic.

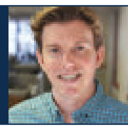
Still, buyers also reported that they have seen a higher share of bookings for upper-upscale and upscale properties since 2019, at 31 percent and 35 percent, respectively. About 24 percent reported a lower share of bookings for upper-upscale hotels, and 16 percent reported less for upscale properties.

Upper-midscale slightly favored a higher booking share, at 28 percent, while about 22 percent of buyers reported a lower share than in 2019. Three in five respondents said there had been no change in midscale booking shares, while a quarter saw fewer midscale booking shares, and only 16 percent reported an increase. After the luxury segment, economy showed the highest decrease of share of bookings since 2019, at 33 percent.

In the beginning of the pandemic, much of the essential travel was at properties in the three- to 3.5-star range rather than the four- to 4.5-star range, said Goldspring Consulting partner Neil Hammond. But those shifts have almost recovered, he added. At the same time, pricing pressure drove some four- to 4.5-star properties down to almost three-star level rates, Hammond said, making full-service hotels more appealing than select service for the same price, which would explain the increase in percentage of bookings for the upper tiers, aside from luxury.

Global travel manager and co-chair of the Global Business Travel Association accommodations committee Mira Rosenzweig agreed that there is less tier shift happening now “because service levels are returning,” she said.

“What I do see is more focus on the experience of the traveler at the hotel,” she added. “If you are going to a name-brand hotel where it’s the same and consistent everywhere you go versus do you want a hotel where you have more of an experience where you can feel like you are in that city, I think those are the conversations the travel managers are having with their travelers. It allows the travel manager to focus not so much on how many stars a hotel has, and more on what does it actually bring in service level, product and experience.”



U.S. Airlines Readying Vaccine Mandates Due to Contractor Status

American Airlines, Alaska Airlines, JetBlue Airways and Southwest Airlines all are implementing Covid-19 vaccine mandates for employees in light of recent guidance from the White House that federal contractors must be vaccinated by Dec. 8.

U.S. President Joe Biden last month announced in a set of executive orders that his administration would require companies with more than 100 employees to have their employees either vaccinated or undergo weekly testing for Covid-19. For federal contractors, however, there is no option for testing.

In a memo to employees, American Airlines CEO and chairman Doug Parker and president Robert Isom said the carrier is classified as a government contractor due to such agreements as the U.S. General Services Administration's City Pair Program and cargo contracts with the Department of Defense.

"While we are still working through the details of the federal requirements, it is clear that team members who choose to remain unvaccinated will not be able to work at American Airlines," Parker and Isom said in the memo.

JetBlue in a statement said it "will fully comply with the federal vaccine mandate for federal contractors, and we have communicated this vaccine requirement to our crewmembers." Alaska Airlines in a memo to employees also said it fell under the contractor requirements and would be requiring them to be vaccinated.

Southwest Airlines said it would require all employees to either be fully vaccinated against Covid-19 or approved for a religious, disability or medical exemption by Dec. 8. The decision came after a "thorough review of President Biden's Covid Action Plan" determined that the carrier's contracts with the government meant it must comply with the mandate, according to a statement from Southwest.

Delta Air Lines indicated it was evaluating the executive order.

"While we continue to evaluate the Administration's plan, Delta is proud to have developed a vaccination program that has already seen 84 percent of employees get vaccinated and is climbing every day," Delta said in a statement. "This follows our announcement of a healthcare premium surcharge, starting in November, and weekly testing which has already begun for those employees who choose to remain unvaccinated."

Some of the largest pilot unions in the United States have been pushing back against vaccine mandates, including both the Allied Pilots Association, which represents American's pilots, and the Southwest Pilots Association. Both unions have said a mandate could lead to pilot shortages in the coming months, with estimates that up to 40 percent of the Allied Pilots Association and as much as half of the Southwest Pilots Association are unvaccinated, the Dallas Morning News reported.

United Airlines said less than 1 percent of its workforce had not received at least the first dosage of a Covid-19 vaccine after its Sept. 27 deadline

United Airlines, which announced a vaccine mandate even before the Biden administration's announcement, said less than 1 percent of its workforce had not received at least the first dosage of a Covid-19 vaccine after its Sept. 27 deadline. The carrier had begun the termination process for 593 remaining unvaccinated employees, and within two days of starting that process, that number dropped to 320 employees, largely due to employees who had been vaccinated but were tardy in uploading their vaccination cards.

"The HR team expects that number will to continue to go down as we enter into individual meetings with employees and find that they are actually vaccinated," according to a United spokesperson.

UAL to Boost Schedule

United, meanwhile, plans to fly 91 percent of its pre-pandemic domestic capacity this December, as the carrier has seen flight search activity surpass 2019 levels for the upcoming holiday season.

The December schedule includes United's largest network to Florida in its history, with 195 daily flights to 12 destinations, the carrier announced. That will include resuming direct flights to Fort Myers from each Milwaukee, Pittsburgh, Indianapolis and Columbus, Ohio, which United said were among its most popular routes last year.

New routes on the December schedule include service between Cleveland and both Las Vegas and Phoenix as well as new service between Orlando and Indianapolis. United also will fly 66 daily flights to ski destinations across the United States.

United reported that flight searches on its app and website are 16 percent higher than they were in 2019, with the day before Thanksgiving, Dec. 23 and Jan. 2 shaping up to be the busiest travel days over the holidays.

Delta to Add Service from Boston

Delta Air Lines will launch five new routes out of Boston next year, including international service to Tel Aviv and Athens, the carrier announced.

Nonstop service to Tel Aviv from Boston will start May 26 followed by service to Athens the next day. Both flights will operate three times per week on Airbus A330 aircraft.

Service from Boston to each Baltimore, Denver and San Diego will begin on July 11, Delta announced. Flights to Baltimore will operate five times per week on Embraer 175 aircraft, while Denver and San Diego service will be daily on Boeing 737-900 and 737-800 aircraft, respectively.

The new routes will bring Delta's Boston hub to 160 daily nonstop flights to 55 destinations, a 20 percent increase compared with October 2019 levels, according to Delta. The carrier is facing increased competition with American Airlines and JetBlue now partnered and adding service out of Boston, though the alliance currently is facing a challenge by the U.S. Justice Department (see story, page 13).

U.S. Justice Department Sues to Block American Airlines-JetBlue Alliance

The U.S. Department of Justice and seven state attorneys general have filed a civil antitrust suit to undo American Airlines and JetBlue's partnership, calling it a "de facto merger" between the carriers in Boston and New York.

The lawsuit claims that the carriers' Northeast Alliance, which combines their operations at Boston and the three major New York airports, would eliminate competition between American and JetBlue both in those cities and across the rest of the United States, due to a diminished incentive by JetBlue to compete with American elsewhere. The DOJ filed the lawsuit in the District of Massachusetts, with attorneys general from Arizona, California, Florida, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Virginia and Washington, D.C., signing onto it.

"In an industry where just four airlines control more than 80 percent of domestic air travel, American Airlines' 'alliance' with JetBlue is, in fact, an unprecedented maneuver to further consolidate the industry," U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland said in a statement. "It would result in higher fares, fewer choices and lower quality service if allowed to continue."

The alliance in January received approval from the U.S. Department of Transportation with some concessions, including a requirement to divest some slots at Washington Reagan National and New York's John F. Kennedy airports. That was in the Trump administration, however, and the Biden administration is operating under an executive order earlier this summer "promoting competition in the American economy."

In a statement provided to BTN, American Airlines countered the claim that its alliance was anticompetitive. Since February, the alliance has resulted in 58 new routes out of JFK, LaGuardia, Boston and Newark and 18 new international routes that either have launched or will start by 2022, according to the carrier.

"Ironically, the Department of Justice's lawsuit seeks to take away consumer choice and inhibit competition, not encourage it."

—AMERICAN AIRLINES' DOUG PARKER

American Airlines chairman and CEO Doug Parker also rebutted claims that the alliance was tantamount to a merger, emphasizing that the carriers are remaining independent.

"Before the alliance, Delta and United dominated the New York City market," Parker said in a statement. "The [Northeast Alliance] has created a third, full-scale competitor in New York and is empowering more growth in Boston. Ironically, the Department of Justice's lawsuit seeks to take away consumer choice and inhibit competition, not encourage it."

JetBlue CEO Robin Hayes in a statement said the alliance is essential for the airline to be able to compete in New York. "There are no slots available at [LaGuardia] and JFK, and it remains extremely difficult to grow in Newark given gate and space constraints," according to Hayes. "Delta and United—with large international networks, ample financial resources, and significant airport gate and slot holdings—have a lock on the market and make it impossible for an airline like JetBlue to grow and introduce sorely needed low-fare competition."

He added that the carriers will continue to implement the alliance despite the lawsuit and said DOJ "is sure to face an uphill battle" in court.

The lawsuit is the second action in recent weeks showing the Biden administration plans to take a hands-on approach regarding airline competition. Last week, U.S. DOT issued a notice that it plans to identify a low-cost or ultra-low-cost carrier to operate 16 peak afternoon or evening slots at Newark to "provide air travelers with more choices and lower prices," according to Deputy Transportation Secretary Polly Trottenberg.

DOT also is working on rules to enhance passengers' rights when a passenger restricted from flying due to Covid-19 must cancel a trip on a flight that is still operating and to increase transparency of ancillary fees, according to the department.

Hertz Names Former Ford Chief Interim CEO

BY MOLLY DYSON

New Hertz interim CEO Mark Fields

Car rental company Hertz has changed up its leadership team, with former Ford chief Mark Fields named interim CEO and previous chief executive Paul Stone named president and chief operations officer.

The moves are effective immediately and come after Hertz restructured following bankruptcy proceedings in the U.S., in which the company accepted new funding from affiliates of Knighthead Capital Management, Certares Opportunities and Apollo Capital Management. The company came out of Chapter 11 this summer.

Hertz says the management changes are "part of a vision for an all-new Hertz that combines the iconic company's brand strength and global fleet management expertise with new technology and innovations charting a dynamic, new course of travel, mobility and the auto industry".

Fields joined Hertz's board of directors in June. He also is a senior advisor at TPG Capital and former president and CEO of Ford Motor Co., where he served for 28 years. In addition, he is lead independent director at Tanium and serves on Qualcomm's board of directors.

Greg O'Hara, founder and senior managing director at Certares and Hertz's chairman of the board, said: "Mark's extensive background in auto and technology will be critical as we remake Hertz for the future. We are building from a renewed position of strength to reimagine the future, and Mark's continued leadership on the board and stepping in for the moment as interim CEO are important next steps to take us there."

Commenting on Stone's move to president and COO, O'Hara added: "The Hertz board is deeply grateful to Paul for his service to the company during the restructuring process. We were delighted that Paul decided to continue working with Hertz in a senior leadership role."

Stone became CEO in May 2020, days before the company filed for bankruptcy amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

CWT Initiates Recapitalization

at the Business Travel Show America virtual conference on Sept. 23. The two spoke at length about the recapitalization. CWT would not provide an updated statement from McKinney Frymire regarding the bankruptcy filing.

Edited excerpts of the conversation follow. See the full interview at businesstravelnews.com.

YOU TOOK THE CEO REINS IN APRIL. WHY WAS THIS THE RIGHT TIME, AND WAS THE PENDING RECAPITALIZATION PROCESS A SITUATION IN WHICH YOUR PRIOR CFO ROLE ALLOWED YOU TO SERVE EFFECTIVELY?

For the year before I took over, obviously we were deeply embattled fighting the pandemic, and the whole industry was tremendously impacted in that year. I was serving both as the president and the CFO. I had an opportunity to be in front of clients a tremendous amount … [and] I was running our strategy team. I had an opportunity to think about … how we could transform ourselves in the midst of [the pandemic] and what we needed to look like coming out the other side. Those were all things I was leading and that really positioned me to look at the company as a whole—to look at our strategy, to look at where we were going and to look at where our industry was going. I do think those things gave me a unique view that allowed me to have a much broader view and interaction with the company and our board in a way that maybe a traditional CFO role on its own might not. I had had a breadth of experiences that prepared me for that president role and from there [the CEO role] seemed like the natural next step. Working through recapitalization is a very arduous journey, and it's one that has taken tremendous amount of effort from the entire organization. But based on where we are and what we have ahead of us, it's been so worth it.

HOW DOES THE RECAPITALIZATION REPOSITION CWT IN THE MARKET?

It's such a vote of confidence from an enormous portion of our investor base about how they see us and our strategy and our management team. When over 90 of your debt holders want to recapitalize your business [and] want to invest, it really tells you how they feel about how we've positioned the company and the work we're doing and the work we want to do. But for us and for our clients and our suppliers and our partners, it's about accelerating innovation. It's about being able to move beyond the pandemic focus and the cost maintenance and the multi-year recovery and into the future. Every TMC big or small has had to manage through an incredibly difficult period. Any business that loses 80 percent of its revenue—or more for some—they have to think differently. We wanted to ensure that even for a multi-year recovery that we had adequate liquidity, that our balance sheet was strong and that we could make the right investments. That's what [the recapitalization] is positioning us to do.

DOES THE CARLSON FAMILY STEPPING AWAY FROM HAVING A MAJORITY STAKE CHANGE THE CULTURE OF THE COMPANY IN ANY WAY?

One of the things we've been really strong and vocal about is that at CWT we have this rich shared heritage with [the Carlsons]. We have shared values and we have shared perspective, and they have been a part of the business for a very long time. They remain incredibly supportive, and they've been incredibly supportive through this process. They absolutely want what's best for the business. But our values are our values. Just because ownership is changing in some construct, it does not change our values. Our strategy is our strategy. The ownership change is not about changing our strategy or our purpose or our values; it's about giving us the financial strength to deliver on our strategy and our purpose and our values.

CWT CEO Michelle McKinney Frymire talks:

- CWT's recapitalization
- The Carlsons' exit
- CWT's recovery paradigms

"The ownership change is not about changing our strategy or our purpose or our values; it's about giving us the financial strength to deliver on our strategy and our purpose and our values."

WHAT RECOVERY MODELS IS CWT WORKING WITH AS BUSINESS TRAVEL BEGINS TO EMERGE FROM SHUT-DOWN?

We are believers that this is a multi-year recovery. Because we're thinking about liquidity and investment, we have taken a fairly conservative approach to our recovery projections. That's been good for us because it also means over the last three or four months we've been exceeding those projections. For staffing, we take a slightly more aggressive perspective. We look at volumes a little bit higher and a little more aggressively because if I think there's going to be a significant uptick in September, I need to be preparing for that in June and July. You're going to bring people back to full-time … or maybe they've got to do some retraining. We have an internal long-range projection that goes all the way through 2024. We think every month how did data come in, how did we do against the competition, how is business travel recovering versus travel as a whole? Also, what does all that mean to our forecasting—does what we learned this month change what we think about next month or the next three months or the next three years? We have a regular process by which we do that, and we don't just look at our own data we look at [external] information. The large strategic consulting firms like McKinsey and BCG have done phenomenal work in this space, and we look at what IATA is saying and at the GBTA surveys and other polls. Most importantly, we hear from our clients. We have the greatest database of people to draw on to ask about the recovery—the people actually doing the traveling.

WHAT ARE YOU SEEING?

I can tell you what I'm seeing right now in real time is that there has absolutely been in the last 30 days a meaningful step up in business travel. It's really exciting for the business and it's not just in one country; it is in multiple countries. That said, it is a highly varied recovery. There are countries like India where the human suffering has been tremendous, and the recovery of business travel is going to lag there. There are countries like the U.S. and France that are definitely leading the way, and certainly China. So we look at it at a pretty granular level not just by region and country but by segment industry segment. ■

Tripbam: Corp. Hotel Volume Recovering After August Dip

BY DONNA M. AIROLDI

Despite a blip in the recovery during August, when market-rate growth flattened and pricing volatility increased, hotel booking volume again is on an upward trajectory and volatility is down once more, according to Tripbam's third-quarter market report. "The dip we saw was related more to late summer holidays than it was to long-term concerns about the [Covid-19] delta variant," according to the report.

The hotel reshopping firm on Sept. 12 assessed data from the previous 30 days and compared it with figures from the same 30 days in 2019. Tripbam used the same customer set it had in 2019 for a like-for-like comparison.

The company found it had processed about 31 percent of the volume it did in 2019, but the average length of stay has begun to return to what it was two years ago, said Tripbam founder and CEO Steve Reynolds during a late September webinar that reviewed the findings. With mostly essential travel happening during the height of the pandemic, the average length of stay had been four to five days, but has returned to a more normal 2.5 days, he said. The 11-day booking window before travel still was shorter than the 16-day window of 2019.

Global market rates were down 28 percent for the 30-day period in 2021 compared with 2019, from an average of $234 to $168, while global booked rates were down 23 percent, from an average of $195 to $150, according to the report.

Looking at rates from a discount level, hotel programs in 2019 delivered about 18 percent in value across all clients, Reynolds said during the webinar. Currently, that percentage is at 17 percent, so there is a "bit of a ways to go to get the same percentage value," he added.

The report projected that global business travel hotel bookings by year-end would be between 40 percent to 60 percent of 2019 levels. As of the end of 2022, Tripbam expects global business travel hotel bookings to reach 80 percent of 2019 volumes, and the company expects that reduction to remain long-term based on conversations with corporate buyers.

"We think [rates] will go up, and we can argue that a static program might be the way to go, and we can argue dynamic might be the way to go. It depends on the market."

—TRIPBAM'S STEVE REYNOLDS

Tripbam also anticipates market rates will reach 2019 levels by the first quarter of 2022 and likely exceed 2019 levels in the subsequent quarters. "Don't roll over rates," Reynolds said. "Get programs in place now so they're in a good position for 2022. We think [rates] will go up, and we can argue that a static program might be the way to go, and we can argue dynamic might be the way to go. It depends on the market."

Further, the report cautioned about dual-rate loading. Some companies worked with hotel partners to introduce dynamic rates and to roll over 2020 static rates, which would in theory act as a rate cap in 2021. But Tripbam found during contract audits that dual-rate loading was often having the opposite effect—the static rate was acting as a floor rather than a cap, leading companies to pay more. "The concern is that some hotels don't have the technology to support it the way it is being sold," Reynolds said. "You need to [perform] audits to make sure it's working. For major chains, it is working as promised, but with some smaller brands, there are some problems."

Egencia Launches AI-Powered Hotel Rate Cap Feature

BY DONNA M. AIROLDI

Travel management company Egencia launched a dynamic hotel rate cap feature late last month at the Business Travel Show Europe in London.

The product uses an AI-powered algorithm to automatically adjust caps for allowable hotel rates according to local market median pricing rather than a manual process. It also can be configured to adjust caps based on different traveler profile groups, such as senior-level executives, for whom higher rate caps might be allowed.

"In the market the past 18 months, two major trends have changed the life of the travel manager," said Egencia VP of multinational and global Manuel Brachet. "First, Covid made business travel a lot more complex, more volatile, with more restrictions and conditions. Supplier prices are changing all the time. Number two is companies have increasingly moved to having travel programs under one roof and mandating their employees book within the program to fulfill duty of care. That's happening against a backdrop of leaner travel management teams. Technology has an increasingly critical role to play to make the life of the travel manager easier."

Travel managers can turn the feature on in the Egencia dashboard. The tool aggregates real-time hotel prices in a specific location to identify a market median, then configures an appropriate price-per-night cap for any traveler booking a room in that city. Travel managers can customize the caps by specifying that only hotels with a minimum star rating are used in the calculation, for example, and can mix and match between dynamic and static hotel rate caps for specific travel groups.

There is no limit to the number of markets that can be included. Customers can choose to use it on its own or in conjunction with manually set rate caps. The dynamic rate cap function is available immediately and is included in Egencia's platform without an additional charge.

Egencia developed the feature in-house and piloted it with 15 customers in the United States, Canada and Germany from February to September 2021, and Brachet said the tool in the pilot drove about $20 in savings per hotel booking. Those users also gave feedback on the ability to configure dynamic hotel policy within the product, as well as how savings and policy compliance are displayed when the feature is activated, according to Egencia.

Australia to Allow Outbound International Travel

BY MICHAEL B. BAKER

Australia will open its border to its citizens for international travel in November, though the ability for foreign visitors to enter remains farther down the road, Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced this month.

Australia's border largely has been closed since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, with only a limited number of Australians allowed to travel abroad and then be subject to a 14-day hotel quarantine upon their return. Nearly 80 percent of Australians have received at least the first dose of a Covid-19 vaccine, Morrison said, and "large parts of the country" will move to "Phase C" of Australia's reopening plan, which includes allowing international travel for fully vaccinated Australians.

Under the plan, Australians will be able to travel and return to a seven-day home quarantine rather than a hotel quarantine. The country also is working toward quarantine-free travel to certain destinations, such as New Zealand, according to Morrison.

In response to the news, Qantas announced plans to restart international service on Nov. 14, a month earlier than it had previously planned. The carrier plans to start with three weekly flights each between Sydney and both London and Los Angeles. Those routes have been the most frequently searched on Qantas' website in recent weeks, and the carrier will add more if demand is greater. The start date might be tweaked once Australia announces an exact opening date.

"We'd already sold out some of our international flights for December and seen strong demand on flights to and from London and Los Angeles, so we're confident there will be a lot of interest in these earlier services," Qantas Group CEO Alan Joyce said in a statement. "Beyond the initial rush, the ongoing demand for international flights will hinge largely on what the quarantine requirements are. The shift to seven-day home quarantine for fully vaccinated Australians with a negative test is a great step towards reducing this closer to what is becoming standard in many countries overseas, which is a test and release program."

Citing a government source, Reuters reported the discussions are underway to also allow foreign visitors into Australia, but it is not yet possible to attach a timeline to that return.

'Jet Airways 2.0' Plans to Take Flight

BY MICHAEL B. BAKER

India's Jet Airways could return to the skies by early next year, according to an investor consortium that is pulling the carrier out of insolvency.

"Jet Airways 2.0" plans to begin domestic operations, starting with service between Delhi and Mumbai, in the first quarter of 2022, according to Murari Lal Jalan, lead member of the Jalan Kalrock Consortium, consisting of Dubai-based Jalan and London-based Kalrock Capital. Short-haul international operations would follow in the back half of 2022.

Jet Airways, then India's second-largest carrier, suspended all operations in April 2019 due to lack of funding. The Jalan Kalrock Consortium had the winning bid to acquire the airline, and its resolution plan was approved this summer by the National Company Law Tribunal.

The consortium's plans are to have 50 aircraft for Jet Airways within three years and more than 100 in the next five years, according to Jalan. It already has hired more than 150 employees and plans to add more than 1,000 more over the next fiscal year.

The new Jet Airways will be headquartered in Delhi rather than Mumbai, its previous headquarters location.

Six Carriers Plan Network-Wide Travel Pass Rollout

BY MICHAEL B. BAKER

Six airlines are planning wide implementation of the International Air Transport Association's Travel Pass health passport tool, the organization announced this month.

Travel Pass health passport tool, the organization announced this month.

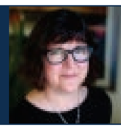
Emirates in late September announced itself as the first carrier undergoing a full global implementation of Travel Pass, which provides information on travel requirements, access to Covid-19 testing centers and digital documentation of test results and vaccination certificates. After tests on select routes starting last April, Emirates now will have the tool available across its full network this month.

IATA announced that Etihad Airways, Qatar Airways, Qantas and its low-cost subsidiary Jetstar Airways, Royal Jordanian and Kuwait's Jazeera Airways also are planning to implement Travel Pass across their networks in a "phased rollout."

During the past 11 months, 76 airlines in total have been testing the Travel Pass technology, and it is now ready for the operational phase, IATA director general Willie Walsh said in a statement.

"The app has proven itself to be an effective tool to manage the complex mess of travel health credentials that governments require," Walsh said. "And, it's a great vote of confidence that some of the world's best known airline brands will be making it available to their customers over the coming months."

IATA Travel Pass currently is able to manage vaccine certificates from 52 countries, representing about 56 percent of the global air travel market. By the end of November, IATA expects that will increase to 74 countries, representing 85 percent of global air traffic.



New API Data Angel Seeks to Give Mtgs. Data Wings

One challenge meeting managers often face is ensuring data accuracy within their meetings reports. A new application programming interface, dubbed Data Angel, aims to help travel management companies and corporations improve that meetings report accuracy through the use of robotic technology.

Data Angel is a software-as-a-service product owned by meetings tech consultancy Meetings Strategy, founded by Kimberly Meyer. Data Angel in real time can identify and correct problems—including misspellings, missing information, budget errors and incorrect contracts—as well as create custom reports, saving hours spent typically using Excel spreadsheets, she said.

"This is a constant problem we hear across every major agency: that a corporation has service-level agreements or key performance indicators and needs good data in a timely manner," Meyer said. "But meeting planners have a ton of work and are busy with a lot of meetings, so it's hard to remember to fill everything in or to go back if they don't have the information [from the beginning]. Data historically has not been good."

Meyer claimed Data Angel is the first in the meetings industry to offer this type of robotic service. The API works like a plug-in for meetings management software. Data Angel currently is partnered with Cvent.

"Cvent has a suite of APIs, developer tools, and developer support resources that enable partners to build, implement and support value-add integrations and apps that are connected to the Cvent platform," VP of product management Brett Fitzgerald said in a statement to BTN. "Data Angel is one of several valued partners who have taken advantage of these tools to deliver value for mutual customers."

Data Angel currently offers two services and is readying a beta test for a third. In addition, the company offers custom automation projects, such as for attendee registration data and other meetings processes, for large corporations.

The first service enables real-time corrections in Cvent at the time of input. If there's a typo—say, Censinate instead of Cincinnati—or the math doesn't add up on attendee numbers, the user will get a pop-up screen from Data Angel when they try to save a record in Cvent, alerting them to the error. They can click on a green box and fix the error at that time, or they can click a "remind me later" option. If they opt to wait, they'll get two more reminders. After the third reminder, they'll be forced to fix the issue, Meyer said.

Meyer claimed Data Angel is the first in the meetings industry to offer this type of robotic service.

Another service offers custom real-time reporting. Meyer gave an example of a client asking for a custom budget report that would take about 1.5 hours to develop in Excel without a macro. With a macro, it could take maybe seven minutes. Data Angel could run the same report in four to five seconds, Meyer said. One pharmaceutical client found they could save more than $200,000 a year just in the amount of time it took to run reports, she said.

The third service, which Meyer said the company in mid-September was in talks with two clients to beta test, is meetings validation. Consulting or outside audit firms assessing a corporate client's meetings today must check in Cvent where meeting documents are located and click through to budget line items on each document, Meyer said. Instead, Data Angel can put all the information related to a meeting onto a single page, including information from the meeting request form and all related documents.

"Instead of going through documents one at a time by hand, in Cvent we can see immediately which documents are missing and route a message to the planner saying to upload your documents," Meyer said. And instead of downloading each document, the auditor can view them in the Data Angel window and scroll through each to see, for example, if the costs matched what was in the budget.

"It cuts what used to take a couple of hours into a couple of minutes," Meyer said.

The product also will remind planners via pop-ups which meetings and tasks are "due" so they prioritize effectively, and don't forget or ignore old meetings and old tasks, Meyer explained. The software uses 30 standard logic rules, but clients can customize the product and request more, Meyer said. Users also can write notes about issues to alert colleagues if they are unable to correct them, or to keep track of details in case the planners on the meeting change.

Pricing depends on which services a customer chooses and how many users Data Angel will support. Meyer added that it takes about two weeks to implement.

"Most corporations don't have IT people dedicated to meetings technology, so we are trying to be efficient to help them do this robotic API work without needing any IT resources on their side," she said. "We're really trying to be plug-and-play."

Meetings Tech Platform Troop Scores $8M in Funding

Meetings management platform Troop has raised $8 million in Series A funding, the company announced late last month at the Business Travel Show Europe in London. Concur co-founder Steve Singh's Madrona Venture Group led the round.

Troop uses data analysis and an algorithm to consider such factors as attendee origination points, flights, travel time, safety risks, costs and carbon footprint to help users find the optimal location and time for meetings and events.

The company plans to use the funds to build out the booking and expense functionality of the tool, according to Troop. Founded in 2017 by co-CEOs Dennis Vilovic, based in Madrid, and Leonard Cremer, who also is Troop's CTO and is based in Johannesburg, the company has incorporated in the United States as part of the financing.

Singh will join Troop as chairman of its board of directors. Madrona also recently invested in Spotnana, a travel management company that in September came out of stealth mode (see story, page 3). Other investors include Epic Ventures, Conexo, All Iron, Plug and Play, Travel Tech 1 – Top Seeds Labs and Founders Factory. The round also included support from Trivago founder Rolf Schromgens, former Egencia president Rob Greyber, former Uber COO Barney Harford and former Concur presidents Jim Lucier and Mike Eberhard.

BCD Debuts New Payment, Spend Mgmt. Platform

BY ADAM PERROTTA

BCD Travel has launched a new corporate travel and expense platform designed to create what the travel management giant described as a "frictionless digital payment experience from trip booking and payment through reconciliation."

Available now to clients as an add-on subscription, the new BCD Pay is a suite of solutions that offer functionalities around travel payment, reconciliation and invoice management—all of which are among the biggest priorities for corporate travel and spending managers as travel resumes post-Covid, BCD said, citing internal client research.

On the payments side, BCD Pay can integrate any form of payment a corporate client chooses, including physical and virtual cards, into a client's preferred online booking tool. Once loaded, the appropriate form of payment automatically is applied to each booking according to a policy rules engine that also enables managers to set spending limits and other controls. BCD Pay in the near future also will offer the ability to integrate cards into mobile wallets for in-trip expenses, BCD said.

Post-payment, the platform's spending management features include an invoice management and automated reconciliation tracker, as well as a data dashboard to track costs and glean insights from travel spending behavior. An API-based integration capability enables spending data to flow into expense management, enterprise resource planning and other third-party systems.

More than 25 percent of clients cited challenges in managing payments for meetings, events and non-employee travel.

BCD Pay's functionalities were designed to address key pain points for its corporate travel clients, the TMC said. A recent BCD survey found that more than half of clients struggled with missing invoices and receipts, credit card reconciliation and the quality of expense and spend data. Meanwhile, more than 25 percent of clients cited challenges in managing payments for meetings, events and non-employee travel, especially with the post-Covid rise of hybrid work.

From travelers' perspective, seamless payment and expense reporting processes obviating paper receipts and manual reporting are highly desired, BCD research showed.

During pilot testing, BCD Pay resulted in 75 percent faster cycle times of end-to-end data ingestion, reconciliation, reporting and data integration, the company said. ◆

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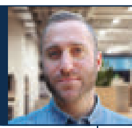

Capital One Nabs Lola's Team, Tech

Weeks after announcing it was ceasing operations and touting "new things to come," corporate travel management startup Lola has revealed details of that next phase: the company will become part of Capital One.

The credit card giant has acquired Lola for an undisclosed sum in a deal that includes the company's workforce and software platform, according to a report by The Boston Globe. In a notice posted on Lola's website, company CEO Mike Volpe and CTO Paul English indicated Lola's team and technology would be applied toward enhancing Capital One's business-to-business payments offerings.

"Our talent and passion for B2B payments will join an existing team at Capital One focused on delivering innovative digital solutions to businesses," the notice read, going on to cite "fintech innovation" and "transform[ing] the business payments industry" as goals moving forward.

While those comments hint that Capital One was interested mainly in Lola's payments capabilities—which the company rolled out last year in a bid to diversify amid the shutdown of corporate travel during the Covid-19 pandemic—Lola's travel offerings also may have been attractive for the credit card provider.

> **Those comments hint that Capital One was interested mainly in Lola's payments capabilities, which the company rolled out last year.**

Such was the case for American Express, which in 2018 acquired artificial intelligence-based travel assistant technology provider Mezi to power its AskAmex travel concierge service for cardholders.

Like that deal, Capital One's acquisition of Lola removes a once-buzzworthy corporate travel provider from the sector. Launched in 2016 by Kayak co-founder English, Lola made a splash two years later, inking an exclusive partnership with American Express Global Business Travel. But the company was hit hard by the shutdown of corporate travel amid the Covid-19 pandemic, announcing in March 2020 that it would lay off 34 employees—nearly one-third of its workforce.

(The partnership was dissolved and all Lola users were transitioned to Amex GBT's Neo1 travel management platform after Lola shuttered operations last month, according to GBT.)

The Lola deal marks the second time Capital One has plucked a company from the corporate travel sector, following its 2020 acquisition of flight disruption management and rebooking tech provider Freebird and subsequent shutdown of Freebird's standalone product.

The deal comes less than two months after another onetime darling of the SME and lightly managed corporate travel segment, Upside Business Travel, met its demise, citing the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic.

But as SME-focused travel management startups face challenges stemming from the pandemic, established TMCs remain eager to serve that segment. Amex GBT in particular has been keenly focused on growing its SME business, citing that goal as a key driver of its planned acquisition of Egencia, along with the expansion of the Neo1 platform to the United States. ◾

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Physical and Neuro Diverse Business Travelers Deserve Support

BY GEORGE KALKA

Can companies factor physical and neuro diversity into the business travel equation? BTN recently asked this question and it's safe to say the answer is 'yes'—without a doubt they *can*. And more in the industry are advocating they should. So why *haven't* we?

This topic was the focus of a recent Global Business Travel Association Global Leadership Professional project. We set out to positively impact how corporate travel can improve the experience for travelers impacted by both visible and invisible conditions who seek additional care along their travel journey. To change how our industry supports travelers with physical and neuro needs, it's crucial to begin raising awareness of their travel experiences and the complexities they face. Until recently, there hasn't been much discussion around this topic or resources available to support travel buyers. Through efforts like the GLP project and BTN's coverage, awareness can graduate into action. As an industry addressing this topic, we've sat on the sidelines long enough with a reactive approach (at best) to caring for our fellow human beings.

Scoping Physical, Neuro Health Needs

Let's start with some simple facts. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, over 61 million Americans live with a disability. That's one-quarter of the U.S. population, so it's no stretch to assume that virtually all travel programs have employees with visible or invisible physical or neuro health conditions that impact the business travel experience. To illustrate this, 14 percent of adults face a mobility challenge, yet the American with Disabilities Act only requires one room for every one hundred in total to have a roll-in shower. There's a 1 percent chance the traveler who needs that room is going to receive it. This friction point is where corporate travel management comes into play and can begin making a difference. If your organization's preferred hotel is sold out of this room type and there is a traveler who requires it, do you allow your traveler to stay at a non-preferred hotel instead?

What if you have a traveler with a cognitive condition, which 11 percent of adults live with, who has difficulty navigating an airport or significantly struggles when flight disruptions or gate changes occur? Does your organization permit a direct flight even if it's more costly?

As a travel manager, if you answered 'yes' to either of these examples, you're on the right path to how corporations can accommodate for physical and neuro diversity within the travel program. Now ask yourself if the experience booking outside of policy is easy for the traveler, or will they need sharp scissors to cut through all the red tape?

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What Can Corporate Travel Do?

A GBTA survey of travel managers on this topic found corporate travel is ripe with opportunity to support travelers with physical and neuro health needs. The gaps to supporting these travelers are wide: over one-third of travel managers didn't even know if their organization had travelers with conditions that impact mobility, and 60 percent of travel managers didn't feel they were prepared to adequately address travelers' physical and neuro health needs. It isn't surprising, given these insights, that over two-thirds of buyers considered their travel programs only 'low to average' in meeting the needs of these travelers.

While few organizations are addressing travelers' physical and neuro challenges beyond the basics or minimum legal responsibilities, some have developed a thoughtful path for these travelers to self-disclose their conditions and plan for their travel-related needs. Given privacy concerns, this process is often outside the corporate travel program and managed through human resources. However, travel leaders are partnering with HR, legal, and diversity and inclusion teams to develop the framework to proactively care for these travelers in advance of and throughout their travel journey. These progressive organizations are removing friction from the corporate travel equation.

Think about the experience of a traveler who self-discloses, which in itself can be an anxious moment for someone. In one organization, the self-disclosing traveler is met with a defined program and process that demonstrates care and dignity throughout the travel journey. Now think how that may play out in a different organization who hasn't planned to support a traveler with these needs. In this organization, the traveler needs to justify a policy exception every time they travel: to book the flight and hotel they need, the multiple levels of approval that may be required, and then potentially request another exception due to increased costs when completing an expense report. At the end of the day, both scenarios provide accommodation for the traveler, but it's safe to say as human beings we all would choose the first experience. So why do so many corporate travel processes operate like the second example?

We must move beyond passing the responsibility and saying it's someone else's job. There's a better way to support these travelers than a one-off case-by-case basis. Corporate travel is in an incredible position to lead initiatives that create common care standards and work cross-functionally so travelers don't have to continue jumping through policy exception hoops and face unnecessary friction throughout their travel experience. In the era of the 'great resignation' there is arguably no better time to invest in the well-being of your workforce. Beyond that, it's simply the right thing to do. ◾

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