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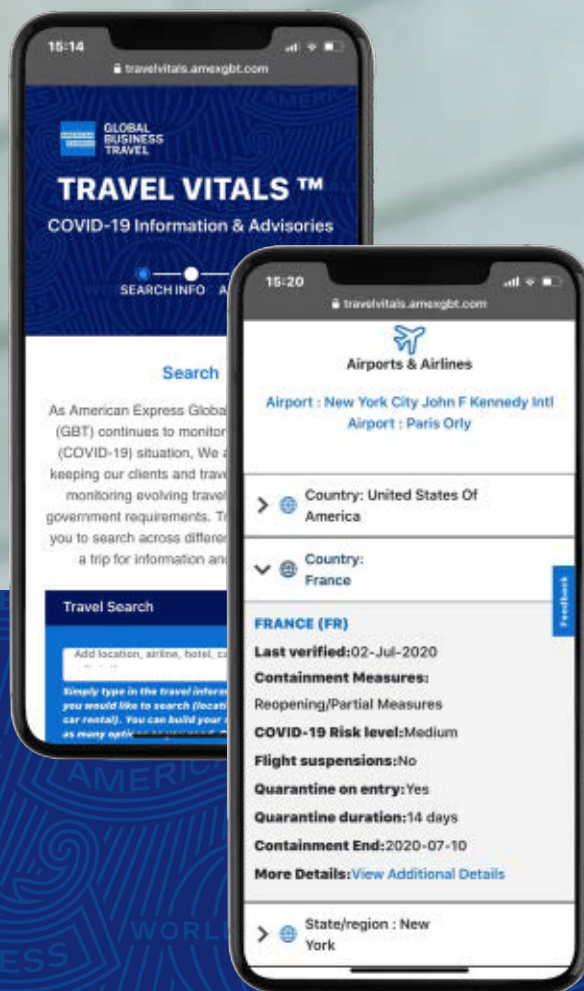
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THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIPS



Drew Crawley, chief commercial officer,
American Express Global Business Travel (GBT)

Embracing change is set to be the 2021 theme for travel managers. There are new complexities to be embraced, and this timely supplement explores strategies for future proofing your travel programme. It is full of insight and information, and should be added to your toolkit for the new year. Sharing knowledge and best practice will be crucial for our collective success.

The power of partnerships has already come to the fore in many ways. Strengthening relationships with suppliers and TMCs is helping travel managers drive new sourcing strategies in the absence of traditional supply and demand forecasting metrics. For GBT, tightening bonds across the value chain has been crucial, and I've been encouraged to see competitors in all segments pulling together to support and advocate for the industry.

The value of managed travel is more visible than ever before. There is now wider recognition of the central role the travel programme plays in supporting duty of care, growth and business objectives. So, despite the challenges we are all facing, I am confident about the future of the business travel sector – and the best way to demonstrate confidence is by investing in that future.

GBT has continued to invest in digital solutions. These included the Covid data-aggregation platform Travel Vitals, new in-app traveller notification capabilities, and connecting our travel counsellors with travellers via the channels they want, such as Apple Business Chat and WhatsApp.

This future is a place where human and artificial intelligence meet, and last year we acquired AI messaging start-up 30SecondsToFly, to boost our capabilities in this area – where machine seamlessly interfaces with real-life experts to enhance customer service.

We're also investing in a sustainable future, supported by data-driven technology. Already today, our travellers can make informed booking decisions about more sustainable options at the point of sale. These topics and more are explored in-depth in this supplement.

I hope that by continuing to work together, and keeping a laser focus on the elements that maximise the value of business travel, 2021 will be a journey, for us and for you, from surviving to thriving.

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The value
of managed
travel is
more visible
than ever
before

Preparation is vital to get the world moving again

Our pro tips offer insights
to help your travellers feel
ready to resume their trips.
**Equip them with sound
advice.**

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**TRAVELER PRO TIPS:
WAYS TO HELP MAINTAIN
YOUR SAFETY AT A HOTEL**

A HOTEL IS YOUR HOME AWAY FROM HOME.
Before you check in, review our tips of traveler pro tips to help maintain your safety while you lodge.

ARRIVING AT THE HOTEL: If you drive to the hotel, consider avoiding valet services to limit those in contact with your vehicle. Upon entering the hotel, have your personal protective supplies handy and ready. Consider using mobile check-in options to avoid personal contact.

HANDLING YOUR LUGGAGE: If you are able, unload your own luggage and take it to your room. Consider sanitizing your luggage upon arrival, especially if it has been handled by others or you've used the hotel via public transportation or rideshare.

ARRIVING TO YOUR ROOM: When you arrive to your room, avoid crowded elevators; make your way by the stairs. When you enter your room, think about bringing your own cleaning supplies to disinfect telephones, remote controls, light switches, fabrics, and other high touch surfaces you feel inclined. Swap hotel linens a towel for your own. Just be sure to return them thoroughly upon your return. Additionally, with your own cleaning in tow, you may also feel comfortable declining housekeeping services to limit traffic to your room.

CONSUMING FOOD AND DRINK: Choose to-go options over sit-down meals. However, if you do choose to be seated at a restaurant, aim for a table outdoors. Look for

For more helpful travel tips, visit [Travel Tips](#). Make sure you also download the **Amex GBT** American Express Global Business Travel.

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**TRAVELER PRO TIPS:
WAYS TO HELP MAINTAIN
YOUR SAFETY AT THE AIRPORT**

BEFORE YOU LEAVE: Try to plan your transit time so that you avoid long wait times in the airport. More time spent there means more opportunities for exposure. Make sure you have masks, gloves, hand sanitizer, or other personal protective supplies to last the duration of your trip.

ON YOUR WAY TO THE AIRPORT: Try driving your own vehicle or have a friend or family member drop you off at the airport to avoid public transportation or rideshare.

CHECKING-IN: Take advantage of mobile check-in ahead of your arrival. If you can't do this, aim to check-in via a self-service kiosk to avoid person-to-person contact. Be sure to keep your disinfectant handy to wipe down touchscreens or buttons.

HANDLING YOUR LUGGAGE: If you are able, sanitize your luggage before entering the airport as a courtesy to luggage handlers. Try to keep items needed during your trip close to your person to avoid opening and closing your bags once inside.

CONSUMING FOOD AND DRINK: Try to avoid eating or drinking copious amounts while in the airport. If you require food, aim

to bring your own from home. If not, look for sealed or prepackaged options, avoiding self-serve, open air, or buffet selections. Use prepackaged cutlery and disinfect your table, chairs, and hands before eating. Be sure to maintain a safe distance from other passengers. Additionally, be mindful that many airlines have suspended onboard food and beverage services so be sure to plan accordingly.

TAKING RESTROOM BREAKS: If feasible, avoid using public restrooms. If you must, avoid high-touch surfaces in the restroom as best you can. Afterward, cleanse your hands thoroughly.

HEADING TO THE GATE: If you choose to sit at the gate, use disinfectant to sanitize your seat. Again, maintain social distancing between you and other passengers.

BOARDING THE PLANE: If seats are available, maintain social distancing between you and other passengers. Once seated, disinfect your seat, arm rests, tray table, and other high touch areas. If you stow items in the overhead storage compartment, be sure to clean your hands afterward.

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GETTING THE GREEN LIGHT

Significant changes to corporate travel policy and tightened approvals processes are now par for the course in a new age of business travel, writes Mark Frary

The veteran business traveller will be feeling like a prized caged bull right now. Thanks to the Covid-19 pandemic, they will be banging their heads against the bars, desperate to get out into the field to do what they do best for their company.

While confidence in the ability to get back on the road may be rising among business travellers as vaccines begin to be distributed, corporates can still be reticent to let their top salespeople out into the world while there are strong barriers to travel and the risk that their prize employees may return with a sharp dose of Covid remains.

“Building confidence and trust in travel is essential, and the burden of proof is higher for business travel. Travellers and their employers need assurance that travel protocols and processes are safe,” says Matthew Love,

travel program manager, Global Business Consulting, American Express GBT.

The answer may lie in an increased focus on pre-approval. A survey by the Global Business Travel Association of more than 2,000 companies found that 53 per cent had implemented new rules relating to the pre-approval of trips. It was the most common change that corporates had made to their programmes as a result of the pandemic.

“Effective pre-trip approval processes can help drive compliance and tighten control, with a stronger focus on the risk, value and purpose of trips. So we expect pre-approval to be more prevalent in the ‘new normal’,” he says.

Love adds that the pandemic has caused companies to evolve their thinking on pre-approval, moving away from purely cost. “Leadership and security teams have put a higher focus on employee safety,” he says. “Pre-approval

supports this by driving travellers to use suppliers that meet clients' health and safety protocols. And, to protect employees while still driving corporate objectives, companies are also using pre-approval to ensure the right employees are traveling for the right reason, often scrutinising non-business-critical trips."

Given the vast quantities of information that need to be considered in using a pre-approval tool for duty of care, automation is essential.

To be efficiently delivered at scale, most of the process needs to be automated, with rules configured in online booking tools to automatically trigger approval requests depending on criteria such as destination, date, cost, employee cohort and the reason for travel.

Compliance with policy, including booking travel through the company's TMC and not directly with suppliers, is likely to come under increased focus in this post-Covid world too.

Nike's EMEA travel manager Daniel Tallos says, "The 'vetting' of suppliers from a health and safety, security risk, but also from a sustainability perspective, will become a more important aspect and thus travel managers will want to continue to 'fight' against bookings outside of the designated channels."

In the short to mid-term, driving compliance through preferred channels is natural and discussions between buyers and suppliers around channel optimisation are likely to increase. In the longer term it will depend on company culture, believes

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The vetting of suppliers from a health, safety and risk perspective is increasingly important

BUILDING A PRE-APPROVAL PROCESS DURING COVID

Many companies continued to travel throughout 2020, although they had to carefully consider how they would travel in different ways and changed their procedures.

Nikki Parsons, interim global travel manager at Arcadis, a multibillion-euro global engineering company, says, "Arcadis has been travelling throughout and the path back to travel will be a path back to more travel for us."

Pre-approval for certain destinations was already in place before the pandemic. "It was very different country by country," she says. "As Covid hit there was a sense that domestic travel would continue but international travel would be restricted and there would be a much closer review and pre-approval of anything that was taking place internationally."

As a result, the company has been carrying out "very close, individual trip risk assessments" for proposed international travel.

The company largely shifted all bookings offline during the crisis although a handful of domestic-only booking tools remained.

"I think we just felt it was going to be easier to control," she says. "We have a combination of travel folks where we have got them partnering with our health and safety team to review those trips in advance and then it goes up to a senior manager to do the business approval."

With the move offline, the company started off with 'paper' pre-approval forms but later developed an app to handle the workflow.

She says, "It is interesting because it sets the tone for what comes next now that people have got used to it. Is it something you want to keep or not? Those conversations are going on at the moment."

Pre-approval will not necessarily stay in place permanently. "I think it will be different for different markets," says Parsons. "We have a big presence in China and there is a sense that they are back to business as usual. If we had different layers of process for them, that would probably feel a bit unnecessary."

"In other markets, where you still have elements of risk, it's a balance. You don't want to get in the way of business – everyone needs to get their revenues in and quickly to try and help come out of this as a business profitably."





Festive Road's managing partner Paul Tilstone. Three key attributes will be needed regardless of whether programmes espouse a preferred channel, he says: the application of company and personal profile data at the search and book phase to ensure the controls and benefits of the programme are applied; the gathering of booking data for health and safety application and overall monitoring across financial, sustainability and people-based KPIs; and lastly, trip support servicing in the face of a challenge/situation. If these "micro-services" are in place then control of the channel becomes less important to some company programmes.

To feel confident, corporates will want to know that their travellers are staying at Covid-safe hotels that are following a set of industry standards, and this means encouraging travellers to 'attach' a hotel to their flight booking.

"Timely communications are a key part of driving better behaviours. For example, push notifications reminding travellers that their safety is a priority and that an approved hotel is essential," says Love.

"Improving hotel compliance can be supported with GBT's Trip Recommender tool. It is automatically triggered by air-only bookings, to send personalised hotel recommendations to the traveller, based on machine

learning of previous trips, colleagues' trips and travel policy," says Love.

He adds, "Air, hotel and ground transport providers have invested a great deal of time and money to create a rigorous set of safety and sanitation protocols to provide a safe and pleasant traveller experience, largely driven by the voice of the customer and health industry experts. Companies are seeking these globally consistent safety standards to ensure their duty of care objectives are met."

Those prize bulls cannot remain caged forever, and corporates are finding ways to unleash them. "We're seeing greater evaluation of a trip's value and purpose," says Love. "For example, in some cases managers are being asked to present a business case for an internal face-to-face meeting outlining clear objectives that can only be achieved by meeting in-person."

He adds: "Research shows there is strong appetite for business travel, and particularly for client and sales meetings where they don't believe virtual interactions are an adequate substitute for meeting face to face."

If travellers can't wait to travel and have the confidence to do so, then pre-approval of trips to make sure it is as safe as reasonably possible will be the confidence-boosting move that corporates need.

IDENTITY POLITICS SPEAKING UP FOR TRAVEL



By **Jason Geall**, vice president & regional general manager, Northern Europe, American Express Global Business Travel (GBT)

Travel is a force for good in the world. It is the engine room of the global economy. We have been making this case to the business community, politicians and governments for years. For anyone who doubted it, the events of 2020 have surely quelled any notion our message was only self-serving.

Travel knits together the social and economic fabric of cities, countries, cultures and beyond. In its absence, trade has all but ceased; many long-established businesses have closed doors for ever; unemployment is spiralling while GDP plummets.

Pre-Covid, videoconferencing was increasingly used for some internal meetings. It was the right approach, though not a new concept. But if a company wants to inspire and innovate while growing its share and attracting the best talent, a travel programme remains a necessity.

According to Statista, the amount of money spent on global business travel in 2019 was US\$1.28 trillion. Other sources offer similar figures: the GBTA reported US\$1.33 trillion in 2017 and, before the pandemic, projected around US\$1.6 trillion for 2020.

A well-managed travel programme is a strategic enabler, not a discretionary cost. Measuring return on investment (ROI) is extremely complex and dependent upon many factors, including, of course, a programme's performance. But research conducted

by respected institutions such as Oxford Economics shows returns valued at many times the investment. When business travel falls sharply, the negative impact on global GDP is multiplied several times over.

Many travel managers do a good job articulating the value of the travel programme to business leaders: not just the positive impact on a company's bottom line, but in helping to achieve duty of care, employee wellbeing and productivity goals.

Business travel is fundamental to economic growth, yet the sector still lacks a discernible identity among many politicians and the mainstream media.

The value – even the concept – of a travel programme seems to be either unknown or unacknowledged outside the walls of our industry. This is why the industry must unite to articulate and amplify the managed travel and meeting proposition.

For months now, GBT has worked with clients, partners and travel associations to advocate for our industry. GBT's CEO, Paul Abbott, sits on the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) steering committee managing the 100 million Jobs Recovery Plan. Andrew Crawley, GBT's CCO, participates on the WTTC's Opening Borders & Air Corridors working group while advising IATA on corporate travel issues.

In the US, we are part of a group of travel companies lobbying government for industry support and the opening of international business travel air corridors. In the UK, we talk to politicians and officials on a regular basis, and participate in the UK's first All-Party Parliamentary Group for business travel, established by the Business Travel Association.

There were few silver linings in 2020. However, industry collaboration, and the need to speak to governments with a united voice, will be an important legacy.

Widespread recognition that virtual meetings have inherent limitations, and can't replace face-to-face interactions in any meaningful way, is another.

We must take these positives and work together to demonstrate to the world why business travel must be empowered if it is to play its vital role in the recovery.

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As an industry, we must be loud and clear on travel's essential role in the recovery



IN IT TOGETHER

The environment for travel suppliers has never been more volatile, so how do buyers successfully navigate through these uncharted waters? Rob Gill reports

Sourcing suppliers may have taken a back seat for the majority of buyers in 2020 as the Covid-19 pandemic grounded many travel programmes, but as the world emerges from the crisis and business travel gradually resumes in the so-called “new normal” there will be a renewed focus on managing these key relationships.

But how can buyers restart sourcing and negotiating with suppliers when nobody really has a clue what demand and supply – and hence pricing – is going to be like in 2021? What’s the point in going through the time and rigours of an RFP (request for proposal) process if the negotiated deals are not competitive in this most volatile of pricing environments?

In this kind of unique marketplace, what’s a buyer to do when putting together a post-Covid travel programme? Ironically, there’s probably no better time to review how suppliers are selected and managed in a more holistic way, concentrating on key partnerships that offer the kind of flexibility and agility essential for travel in Covid times. These partnerships also have to reflect changing priorities such as the pre-eminence of duty of care.

It could, of course, be easy to just fall back on your current arrangements – many suppliers have simply rolled over 2020 deals into 2021, as well as

relaxing volume requirements on negotiated deals. But are these prices still going to be relevant or competitive in such uncertain times?

Sourcing strategies

Being agile will be paramount for both buyers and suppliers as the road to business travel recovery may well be pretty bumpy in the coming months as the world starts to emerge from the coronavirus crisis.

Tendering and RFP processes may also continue being disrupted by key contacts at suppliers being on furlough or working reduced hours – buyers taking part in the Institute of Travel Management’s virtual huddle noted that this was “impacting the decision-making around extending or going out to tender”, although they also recognised suppliers were in a “challenging situation”.

Julie Avenel, vice president, Global Consulting Group at American Express Global Business Travel, says: “The supplier situation is very fluid, with buyers and travellers scanning every channel to find the best content. Buyers currently appear to be in a strong position versus suppliers – but you have to think ahead to the return of travel.”



SOURCING TIPS

■ Focus on key suppliers by identifying the most important airlines and routes that can deliver the best value and savings, while hotels should meet company objectives and travellers' health and safety needs.

■ Make sure you can access dynamic prices and re-shopping tools to get the best rates and fares where they represent better value than negotiated deals.

■ Communicate regularly with internal stakeholders to explain the objectives and priorities for your post-Covid sourcing strategies.

■ Proactively monitor suppliers through regular engagement to ensure you are getting the best rates and they are meeting other priorities, particularly health and hygiene requirements.

■ Look at ways to drive up compliance rates and reduce leakage from the programme. Some organisations may want to mandate the use of certain suppliers to increase compliance and improve both savings and duty-of-care.

■ Create a vigorous process for regularly monitoring travel savings within the programme as a way to illustrate its value to the organisation.

■ Capture and analyse regular feedback from travellers assessing how they feel, what they need and their willingness to travel.

■ Plan ahead for the coming months based on different scenarios so you can pivot your programme to save money and meet other objectives as supply and demand changes.

Avenel adds that consolidation of data will also be crucial in the new environment with buyers urged to look at their spending across their whole programme, including meetings and events, hotels, ground transport and ancillaries, to give them full visibility and control. This will help to pinpoint the key suppliers they want to use that fit company objectives as well as travellers' needs, including health and hygiene standards.

Jo Lloyd, partner at consultancy Nina & Pinta, says it's too early to know what lasting impact the crisis will have on suppliers until the "mist around the market clears", and adds that there could be "upward pricing pressure" in the market. She also advises buyers to look at where there are gaps in the end-to-end travel process and "how to plug them".

"It would also be prudent to engage within the business and speak with the internal budget

“

Being agile will be paramount for both buyers and suppliers as the road to business travel recovery may well be pretty bumpy

holders, stakeholder groups and key travellers to try to get a sense of how and where their business is likely to start returning,” adds Lloyd. “This will help to inform a strategy of engagement with the supply chain moving forward.”

Buyers will also need to be able to take advantage of dynamic rates and re-shopping features to get the best prices from suppliers, says Raj Sachdave, managing partner at Black Box Partnerships.

“Travelling culture around flexibility will need to be controlled in order to ensure the best rates and products are offered. There’s always a ceiling on price versus flexibility which both suppliers and buyers needs to balance out,” adds Sachdave.

Getting the right data

Being able to tap into the right data will be vital in helping buyers to win support from their organisation’s management as they look to reshape the post-Covid travel programme. Hotels, for example, can be assessed through several metrics: average cost, distance to office or client, traveller requirements, facilities, and health and safety procedures.

“Data is key to winning buy-in from this widening set of internal stakeholders,” says GBT’s Avenel. “With data you can show stakeholders the value of your new sourcing strategy and explain what your organisation gains from the new approach – for example, spend reduction.

“But today sourcing is about more than just getting the right rates. For many clients, it’s also about getting the right supplier; a supplier that understands your travel patterns and needs and can support the initiatives of other parts of the organisation like HR, security and legal.”

Having the most relevant data at your fingertips is crucial, agrees Pascal Jungfer, CEO at Areka Consulting, who stresses the importance of “knowing your programme and your key routes”.

He adds: “You need to identify partners who meet your safety concerns and offer added value to your travellers,” he says. “Factors such as the waiver of cancellation and change fees at the last minute are now more important than the lowest rate.”

As well as communicating to management, a successful sourcing strategy will also rely heavily on “selling” the programme to the travellers themselves, who may well be nervous about hitting the road again.

“As we return to travelling, expect passengers to be more vocal about their experience and input into Covid measures,” says Black Box’s Raj Sachdave. He continues: “Measuring satisfaction and wellbeing will be significant for most programmes as an



addition to most existing measures. Internally there will be more focus on ensuring there’s a solid ROI (return on investment) for travelling in the first place – the acceptable threshold to travel has changed forever because of Covid.”

With the travel sands shifting beneath everybody’s feet, buyers face the herculean task of managing key suppliers – many of whom are facing their own battles to survive – while trying to get the best rates and ensuring they don’t put their travellers in harm’s way.

In this most volatile of landscapes, TMCs are uniquely placed at the juncture between buyers and suppliers to help navigate through this kind of complexity and fast-moving changes.

“All of us want to see the safe return of travel,” says GBT’s Avenel. “To make it happen we need to work as partners and the TMC is pivotal to making that partnership happen.

“It’s more important than ever to keep lines of communication open between buyers and suppliers, so that suppliers understand – and can support – the buyer’s evolving travel plans and priorities around price, value, health and safety.”

Nobody is going to pretend the next few months are going to be easy, but there are steps that buyers can take to facilitate a successful resumption of corporate travel that both keeps costs under control and enhances duty-of-care for travellers.

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A successful sourcing strategy will rely heavily on “selling” the programme to the travellers themselves, who may well be nervous about hitting the road again

SUSTAINABILITY

MAKING THE

RIGHT CHOICES



By **Nora Lovell Marchant**, global director of risk, compliance & ESG, American Express Global Business Travel (GBT)

It is not surprising that sustainability remains high on the agenda for a majority of travel buyers as they adapt their programmes for the recovery.

Today's new level of scrutiny, where each trip is more carefully evaluated, puts sustainability as a natural fit alongside criteria such as risk, value and purpose. And it is now more integral to the programme and policy drivers, being closely aligned with cost control and duty of care.

To build a more sustainable travel programme you need to get executive level support by illustrating why it aligns with your organisation's objectives and reputational risk management, as well as contributing to the bottom line. Get support from your TMC with defining measurable goals, and providing data insights and tools to help analyse your programme performance and reduce its environmental impact.

Of course, you also need your travellers to be engaged. Business travellers on the whole are intelligent people who want to do the right thing, so make sure they have the right information at their fingertips when booking. The relevant data, displayed clearly at point of sale, is key to enabling your travellers to make informed choices.

For example, last year we built a carbon filter on GBT's proprietary booking platform, Neo, so search results for rail and air tickets can be filtered by CO2 emissions. We've also added a new green hotel badge to Neo: the OBT can be configured to display a badge next to those hotels or brands that meet a client's environmental standards and criteria, driving travellers to book these properties.

Along with enabling smarter booking choices, another key opportunity is carbon offsetting. One challenge is the vast range

of offsetting programmes – how do you know which to choose? GBT has partnered with the Carbonfund.org, a non-profit organisation known for supporting the highest quality carbon reduction projects in the world.

Internally, GBT offsets 100 per cent of employee business travel through the Envira Amazonia Project, a tropical rainforest conservation project run by Carbonfund.org. This project was awarded Triple Gold Distinction for its exceptional biodiversity and community benefits, alongside climate change mitigation. The project serves a double purpose of both offsetting CO2 emissions and creating a positive social impact for local communities: it protects rainforest from destruction for large-scale cattle ranching, while supporting local communities by providing resources and training to establish alternative sources of income and employment.

Externally, GBT now offers the option to purchase carbon offsets through Carbonfund.org, facilitating our clients in meeting their sustainability objectives. This partnership enables GBT clients to buy CO2 offsets from Carbonfund.org on preferred terms. Clients can choose from a variety of project types, price points and locations across the world. Each project follows a quality assurance protocol, including independent certification, validation and auditing – so our clients can trust in the highest global standards.

Meetings and events programmes offer potential for improving sustainability. Your TMC should be able to help you source providers that offer greener venues and operations. For example, can your providers be audited for best practices in food and beverage? These include minimising food wastage and food miles – and single-use plastic – as well as offering eco-friendly menus, low-impact food types, and using ethical, local producers.

Going forward, one of the travel industry's greatest challenges is transforming aviation into a low-carbon industry. It requires what UN global regulator the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) describes as a 'basket of measures'. One of these measures is advancing the development and adoption of sustainable Aviation Fuels (SAF). SAF is derived from renewable sources such as inedible fats and oils, and agricultural and municipal waste. SAF has the potential to reduce carbon emissions by 80 per cent, while greatly reducing direct emissions such as particulate matter and sulfur oxide, critical to local air quality. GBT advocates for an industry-wide transition to SAF as a key step on the roadmap to sustainable travel.

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Your TMC should be able to help you source providers that offer greener venues and operations

LONE RANGERS

Consideration for business travellers' mental and physical wellbeing must be taken to new levels as the focus on duty of care sharpens, writes Mark Frary

Business travel, at its heart, is about one person meeting another person. What became clear during the pandemic is that if those people do not have the confidence that they can travel, business will shudder to a halt.

And confidence, in a world where just meeting people puts you at risk of catching a potentially deadly disease, has been in short measure. Yet confidence is coming back. A Global Business Travel Association survey this winter found that half of travel buyers said their organisations' employees are now willing to travel.

Suppliers are aiming to instil confidence in travel through initiatives like United and British Airways' Covid testing trials, Marriott's global cleanliness council and IHG's Clean Promise – all great for building confidence. Such efforts are not just restricted to airlines and accommodation.

"Managed travel is a more thoroughly end-to-end process now, with more focus on, for example, airport transfers," says Raksa Ouk, senior director, digital product management at American Express Global Business Travel. "This can mean telling travellers to use preferred car services that have been audited for hygiene standards, providing information on where public transport can be used or not, and advising on precautions such as facemasks."

Being safe in suppliers' hands is one thing, but communicating that safety is paramount is another. Nikki Parsons, interim global travel manager for global engineering company Arcadis, says, "We have a duty to inform our travellers and it is incredibly important to make sure that information is accurate and up to date."

Her company has asked its travellers to go to the duty of care provider themselves to get informed. "They come back to us and tell us the Covid risk and we tell them how the trip is going to be different," she says.

Scaling that back up as travel reopens may be a challenge. During the pandemic, some organisations turned off their online booking tools and handled transactions solely offline because of the increased complexity and fast-changing situation around cancellations. Lower travel volumes clearly made this feasible.

"Everything has become very manual and that has been OK during the pandemic but it won't be post-crisis. That needs to be something we address," says Parsons.

Daniel Tallos, EMEA travel manager for Nike, believes there will be more human interaction, at least in the short term. "It is likely that the self-service tools will not tick all the boxes, or people will need to speak to someone if they do not trust the information provided or they have specific questions. Also, personal situations may trigger additional questions," he says.

Festive Road's managing partner Paul Tilstone says, "As volumes return, and technology adapts to meet the new environment, we'll see the same trend towards online return but crucially, human servicing may now also be offered where there are more complex needs based on the person's individual health and safety circumstances."

For Amex GBT, this will be enabled by its free-to-use Travel Vitals platform, which aggregates and updates Covid-19 information from hundreds of sources, including airlines, hotels and ground transport providers, as well as health and governmental authorities around the world.

Ouk believes visibility on safety standards is also paramount. "From the outset of the pandemic, GBT has continued to work with clients, partners, government agencies and industry bodies such as IATA and the WTTC to drive implementation and adoption of globally recognised biosafety standards and protocols," she says.

Nike's Daniel Tallos believes travel risk concerns are with us for the foreseeable future. "More information and tools need to be provided at the planning and booking stage, but also while on the road in case circumstances change. These solutions will need to be self-service, reliable, scalable, automated and low maintenance, and they will need to be seamlessly embedded in the travel booking process."

It is not just physical health that companies need to think about. A recent survey on risks faced by business travellers by International SOS predicted that mental health issues will overtake Covid-19 in 2021.

GBT's Ouk says, "Part of supporting mental health is understanding concerns and building confidence. Having informational tools – such as Travel Vitals – is part of that but also companies should review policies and culture to make sure employees don't feel forced to travel if they are worried or stressed about the trip."

"This is why it is important to involve stakeholders such as HR in the travel programme. HR and security teams should be aligned and consulted on



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More information and tools need to be provided at the planning and booking stage, but also while on the road if circumstances change



how best to implement traveller feedback and engagement processes that are two-way conversations.”

Corporate wellbeing expert Dr Lucy Rattrie says regular travellers have been experiencing a rollercoaster of emotions in recent months. These have fluctuated between “the lack of travel feeling like a blessing as it gives time to be with family and recover from the stresses of life on the road, to feeling as if one has been captured and is unable to escape,” she says.

“A lot of travellers will have lost their sense of identity, meaning and purpose, feel uncertain about their future and therefore searching for a clear path forwards and wanting to be certain of their place in the world – and their role – again,” Rattrie explains.

Travel has always involved an element of stress and the industry’s recovery represents an opportunity to remove some of the pain points. Dr Rattrie recommends companies start using regularly tracked wellbeing indicators as part of the decision-making toolkit for travel which will help shift the focus from cost to effectiveness.

That mention of cost will be a concern for the very many companies that have struggled financially during the pandemic. “Investing in the consumer journey definitely means hard cost or resources needed to upgrade the experience and lower friction levels,” says Nike’s Tallos. “However, this investment will need to be compared with the potential benefits on higher productivity and retention as a result.”

Traveller centricity does not have to mean increased costs. If company and traveller objectives and culture are aligned, employees will want to make the right decisions for the benefit of all.

While the world waits for relief from Covid, travellers are going to be keen on a touchless world and technology will play an important role in that.

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Travel has always involved an element of stress and the current pause represents an opportunity for the industry to remove some of the pain points

Many hotels have accelerated their move to contactless check-in/out and smartphone keys, while Emirates recently announced a touchless fast-track channel for passengers travelling through Dubai.

Although it is still in its relatively early stages, artificial intelligence (AI) will also help business travellers feel confident they have all the information they need before undertaking a trip. American Express GBT recently acquired AI and messaging start-up 30SecondsToFly for example, which will help with automated service requests.

Ultimately, travellers are all different and different nudges will be needed to restore their confidence, as Arcadis’ Parsons notes.

“We are all individuals and all will have very different views on this. Some will be desperate to get back on the plane and others just won’t be; that will be a very personal thing. Everyone has very different circumstances and all that will come into play.”

FULL STEAM AHEAD

In a new report, [Let's go by Train](#), industry experts set out the changes needed for putting rail at the heart of business travel recovery

Rail should be a no-brainer for business travel. For many trips, the train is more convenient, more comfortable and gives travellers more space to work or relax.

For companies looking to green their programme, today's efficient trains outperform the car and the plane on emissions. And, as travel begins to return, rail providers offer clean, contactless experiences that should give travellers the confidence to get moving again.

Business travellers in mainland Europe have embraced rail: prior to the pandemic-enforced travel shutdown, it accounted for 40 per cent of the bookings made on GBT's Neo online booking tool. But in the UK, rail is not fully integrated into the managed travel mix. Clive Wratten, chief executive of the Business Travel Association, explains: "Travel management companies (TMCs) understand rail is a huge opportunity, but poor integration of systems and the pricing framework remain real barriers to them getting into rail."

The fragmented nature of rail – with its various retailing, pricing, ticketing and information systems – makes it difficult for rail providers and their TMC partners to provide the quality of customer experience that business travellers expect. Fares are often bewilderingly complex and inflexible. While reliability and punctuality are improving, rail travellers are frustrated by the lack of information when disruptions occur. Without access to real-time data about train movements, TMCs struggle to make alternative arrangements for their travellers.

A new departure

The end of rail franchising in the UK, a casualty of the pandemic, creates an historic opportunity to tackle rail industry fragmentation and overhaul the customer experience. GBT's



[Let's go by Train](#) report highlights five areas – identified by experts from across the UK and international rail ecosystem – where train operating companies (TOCs), industry bodies, and TMCs can work together to accelerate customer experience improvements.

One key recommendation is the creation of a unitary national rail authority – styled an 'IATA for UK rail' – to provide centralised direction on planning and innovation across the rail system. This body could drive industry-wide standards while leaving room for individual TOCs to innovate and create differentiated products.

Digital is another key focus. The new strategic rail body could require and monitor open data sharing across the industry. As well as spurring the development of new services by third party developers, open data will make more rail content available on online booking tools, where bookers can compare rail options against other modes.

With increased collaboration and shared focus on the customer, rail is set to become a truly compelling proposition for the business traveller, ready to play a pivotal role in recovery.

The new report from American Express Global Business Travel, *Let's go by Train*, sets out a five-point programme for integrating rail into managed travel. [Download the full report here.](#)

COMMUTING OR TRAVELLING?

Headlines about the rising cost of season tickets are practically a New Year's custom in the UK. Could 2021 be the last year these stories feature on the front pages?

Even before the pandemic made home working mandatory for millions of employees, traditional commuting was running out of time. The average two-hour daily commute looked increasingly out of tune with concerns about work-life balance.

As flexible and remote working becomes more common, traditional season tickets – designed for a Monday-Friday, 9-5 working week on a set route – look less and less like good value. Last May, the Rail Delivery Group announced a UK-wide consultation on fare options.

But perhaps new fare structures are only the beginning. Contributors to *Let's go by train* believe that rail commuting is a form of business travel, which impacts on employee wellbeing, and should be managed as such.

JOINED UP THINKING

Everybody learnt how to host virtual meetings during 2020 but what impact will this have as in-person events resume, asks Rob Gill

Expect to hear lots about 'hybrid meetings' in 2021 as physical meetings and events slowly start to resume after the almost total reliance on videoconferencing platforms during 2020.

Hybrid meetings – combining 'in person' gatherings with digital or virtual contributions – are not just likely to be a stop-gap solution to see the industry through the rest of the Covid-19 pandemic; they are also predicted to mark a fundamental shift in the way meetings and events are managed and presented.

The resumption of physical events will also illustrate the importance for organisations to ensure they have a joined up travel and meetings strategy, particularly for smaller meetings that may have previously slipped through the cracks between these programmes.

Tracey Boreham, director of operations, meetings and events, at American Express Global Business Travel, says: "All the research shows most people and organisations believe that for important moments there is no substitute for engaging with people face-to-face, and this will continue. We are now all vividly aware of the limits of meeting virtually. The value of face-to-face experiences is more widely recognised than ever.

"But virtual options will also continue to play an important role: where attendance or numbers are restricted, hybrid events combine virtual and physical events to enable a wider group of people to attend."

Working in harmony

One consequence of the pandemic is that organisations are looking more closely than ever at all elements of their spending, including both meetings and travel, so they can effectively evaluate their return on investment for each and every event.

A significant percentage of spending on M&E (meetings and events) has traditionally been unmanaged and that has meant challenges in ensuring there is true visibility of spending for many organisations.

Creating this transparency of M&E spending is a crucial step, says GBT's Tracey Boreham, who advises: "See if you can work with the various internal stakeholders to review all M&E spend, including group travel and venues.

"Ideally you want to consolidate all this spend, for example through the TMC booking channels. Often the travel programme is more mature than the M&E programme, so look at protocols and best practices in your travel programme, and explore ways in which these can be applied to M&E."

Making sure your corporate travel and events policies are aligned is another vital aspect in creating a seamless and effective joined-up strategy. This also helps to improve duty of care and risk management by being able to track employees' locations and travel plans when necessary.

Buyer Vera Strezyk, who is a member of GBTA's meetings committee, adds: "Details around budget approval and pre-trip approval is an area where there is synergy. That's also the case with duty of care, ensuring travellers follow health and safety protocols in light of new guidelines. There may also be opportunities around venue sourcing and aligning business requirements across travel and meetings."

Getting a handle on small or 'simple' meetings, which make up around 50 per cent of all corporate events, is also becoming more of a focus for organisations.

M&E technology provider Cvent reveals that RFPs (requests for proposal) for small events accounted for 40 per cent of all tenders processed through its supplier network since July 2020.

Ensuring these smaller meetings are integrated into the wider travel and events programme will become even more important in 2021 as they are set to "take centre stage as the natural first step in the recovery", adds Cvent's founder and CEO Reggie Aggarwal.

In 2019, GBT launched Meetings Express, a single platform for sourcing small and simple meetings. Today, with less office commuting and more remote working, the platform can also be used for booking workspaces for individuals and for small teams such as hotel rooms with desks, converted suites or small meeting rooms.

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In the future we will need to adapt and be creative. We will need to build a virtual meetings programme with the help of technology



Tech revolution

While there have been plenty of signs of so-called ‘Zoom fatigue’ as people tire of using videoconferencing and pine for a return to face-to-face meetings, there is no doubt the Rubicon has been crossed when it comes to the digitisation of meetings and events. Meetings are never going to be the same again after Covid.

“The path forward will be about digital transformation,” says Aggarwal. “Even when we go back to in-person events, organisations are not going to want to give up the value of virtual events. You can get double, treble and sometimes five times the registrations compared with in-person events.”

Aggarwal also argues this technological revolution and onset of hybrid events will improve ROI for both those hosting events and their attendees, with larger potential audiences and more creative ways to analyse attendee engagement and feedback.

Vera Strezyk adds: “In the future we will need to adapt and be creative. We will need to build a virtual meetings programme with the help of technology.” She adds: “Deciding on whether you need a virtual meeting solution or face-to-face meeting will largely be down to the presenter, the reason for the meeting and the way they would like to engage with the client.”

None of these changes – particularly the shift to virtual – is hugely surprising to anybody in the corporate travel and meetings world but the pandemic is likely to have accelerated their adoption and integration by several years.

This makes the case for joined-up thinking on travel and meetings something of a no-brainer in a world where uncertainty rules – at least in the short-term – and is an opportunity that buyers can use to show their value to their organisations by finally bringing the two categories together effectively and efficiently.

MEETINGS & EVENTS TRENDS

Top factors influencing whether to hold an in-person event

- 68%** - Confidence in attendee health and safety components
- 59%** - Flexible cancellation and attrition terms

Virtual meetings – the top three challenges

- 40%** - Lack of experience
- 32%** - Technical issues
- 18%** - Lack of engagement

The view from Europe

- 79%** - Somewhat/very optimistic about using technology to enhance user experience
- 67%** - Very likely/certain to address sustainability in meetings and events programmes

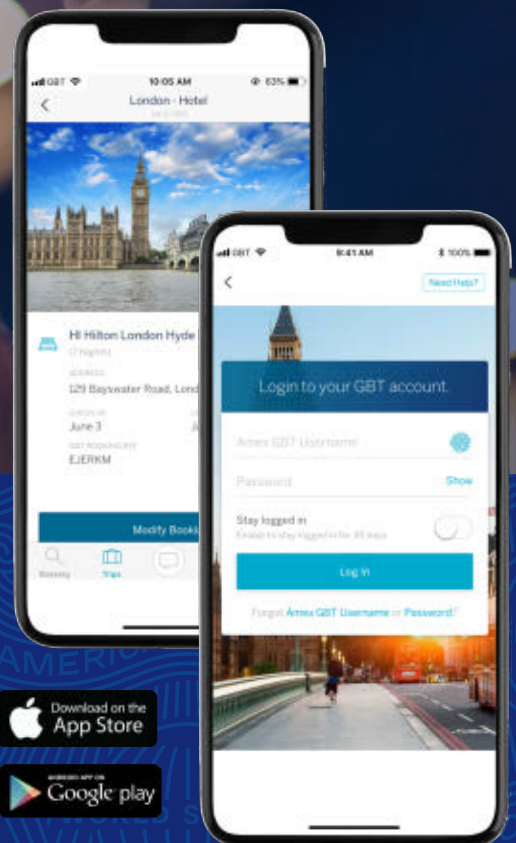
What’s included in European M&E policies?

- 76%** - Contracting with preferred suppliers
- 70%** - Include small and simple meetings
- 64%** - Specify meetings management technology
- 58%** - Include virtual and hybrid events

Source: [2021 Global Meetings and Events Forecast](#), [American Express Meetings & Events](#)

Information is vital to get the world moving again

The Amex GBT Mobile app is here to help. Your travellers can select their trips, view itineraries, get updates and receive travel counsellor assistance – **all at your fingertips.**



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