



BEING RESILIENT

A PLAYBOOK
APPROACH TO
NAVIGATING
DISRUPTION
IN THE TRAVEL
INDUSTRY

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The travel and hospitality industry has been disrupted by several unforeseen events in the past. However, the protracted shutdown following the pandemic raises pointed questions about the business of travel: Will the Coronial / Quaranteen / Baby Zoomer generation travel as much as their parents, faced with escalating curbs and costs? Does 'load' factor become an oxymoron as a result of social distancing? Will leisure travelers balk at the prospect of future travel after stringent check-in, immigration, and baggage policies come into force? Does business class travel diminish with virtual meetings and video conferencing?

The travel business has survived setbacks from 9/11 to the eruption of volcanoes in Iceland and Indonesia. The pandemic is yet another existential crisis which requires the industry to work in unison and navigate disruption. Let us evaluate a playbook approach to ensure that travel and hospitality enterprises become more tactile to sense and respond to disruption, mitigate risks, and become resilient.

Welcome (back!) aboard

The pandemic has disrupted business as well as leisure travel. When travel restrictions are lifted, business travel will be curtailed as global enterprises encourage executives to use videoconferencing tools and enterprise collaboration software. Similarly, leisure travelers will defer vacation plans till countries and travel destinations are certified as safe zones.

Travel and hospitality enterprises need to motivate travelers with genuinely attractive offers. Significantly, airlines and hotels need to empathize with travelers who

forfeited bookings during the lockdown. A customer-friendly policy to recoup the money spent toward future travel and accommodation along with a waiver of rescheduling fees will cultivate customer loyalty. Airlines are exploring several ways to retain customers. Aer Lingus offers fliers a credit voucher with a 10% bonus transferable to individuals without penalty for a period of five years. Southwest Airlines has extended the validity of the tier status and benefits of A-List and A-List Preferred Members of their Rapid Rewards program till December 2021.

The existing technology landscape needs to be configured to adapt to the new business logic of rescheduling. Airline and hotel reservation systems, and loyalty management and frequent flier programs need to reflect new offers, booking status, and revised terms and conditions. Significantly, travelers should be able to avail of these offers across multiple touchpoints of the airline, hotel or online travel agent website, and mobile app. Airlines can evaluate extension of miles expiration or sell miles at a discount.

Mind the gap

The pandemic is set to usher in a contactless travel experience from the point of origin to destination. In the future, security and safety protocols at the airport will pivot towards zero-touch, paperless processes. For instance, airlines can adopt do-it-yourself (DIY) policies for fliers to check-in and board aircraft using their mobile devices. Further, fliers can scan their mobile boarding passes at a kiosk and print their baggage tags.

A safe and expeditious immigration process for hundreds of thousands of daily fliers is imperative for social distancing. In the foreseeable future, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) needs to evaluate an advanced facial recognition or iris scanning system to authenticate the identity of travelers. Iris scanning at scale has been undertaken for the Aadhaar program, the unique identification number system, operated by the Government of India. The program uses iris scanning for 15% of more than one billion Indian citizens where biometric reading of fingerprints is not possible.

The contactless journey needs to extend to in-flight services where fliers would be required to order food and beverages on their mobile devices and pay using a digital wallet.

Safe journeys

Airlines and hotels need to establish a rigorous hygiene charter to safeguard the health of guests and ensure that locations where guests travel / transit and live are sanitized at all times. The industry needs to address the dynamics of virus transmission and 'community spread' across the travel journey.

Travel and hospitality enterprises need to develop stringent health and hygiene operational procedures that are incorporated into the Environment, Health and Safety (EHS) policy. It is imperative that this critical function is automated by robots. Robotic automation needs to be augmented with data capture of the locations, schedules and anomalies, and sharing of data logs with housekeeping staff for oversight and remedial action.

Hotel chains need to adopt industrial robots at scale to address the scope of cleaning. Robots of Shanghai Lingzhi Technology undertake uninterrupted deep cleaning for three hours and release disinfection gas as part of the regimen. Airlines are adopting advanced hygiene practices. Delta undertakes interior fogging to disinfect domestic as well as international aircraft, United uses electrostatic sprayer cleaning technology to disinfect wide-body international aircraft. Allegiant Air uses a protectant solution for a microscopic film to neutralize any virus, germ, or bacteria on surfaces.

Airports, guest lounges, and hotels will be required to undergo regular deep cleaning in an unobtrusive manner. Aircraft that have undergone deep cleaning at hangars may now be sanitized after landing and disembarkation of passengers. It may affect turnaround times, but airlines can adopt robotic automation for swift and efficient deep cleaning.

Self-regulation

The lockdown after the pandemic resulted in restrictions on the movement of people, flight suspension, and imposition of precautionary safety measures by civic and health authorities. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) may devise specific protocols for travel and hospitality enterprises to ensure the safety of travelers. The travel industry needs to work closely with regulatory bodies while proactively adopting measures to ensure the health and wellbeing of travelers and employees.

The industry can take a cue from South Korea which managed to contain transmission with swift action, extensive testing, and contact tracing. The government enacted legislation to retrace the movement of patients by using GPS data of mobile phone users, credit card transactions, and security camera footage. Since a traveler's journey involves

interfacing with multiple entities such as the airport taxi / shuttle or ride hailing service, airport, immigration, airline, and hotel, the travel and hospitality industry can collaborate on an Application Program Interface (API) system for contact tracing while anonymizing personal data.

Airlines can install unobtrusive thermal image cameras and body-temperature scanners to identify passengers with fever before boarding the aircraft. Airport facilities may be required to establish bio-safety labs equipped with air handling units, virus burners, and plasma sterilizers. The new infrastructure needs to be integrated with the digital ecosystem of airlines, immigration, and airports.

Employee-first

The travel and hospitality industry needs to adopt a humane approach to managing the health, safety, and wellbeing of its workforce. Furloughs / layoffs are an unfortunate fallout of the lockdown. Companies need to navigate this delicate period with compassion and support their staff with counseling services.

Airlines and hotels are being challenged by the volume of calls and e-mails from travelers who wish to cancel, reschedule, or obtain refunds for their bookings. The hospitality industry can reallocate a sizeable number of employees at their contact center to address customer

queries. Qantas is working with Woolworths to redeploy staff at the retailer's stores and return to work at the airline after resumption of flights.

The travel and hospitality industry should accelerate the adoption of digital tools to undertake learning programs for workforce upskilling. Similarly, HR needs to maintain employee morale and wellbeing with regular digital communication. When operations resume, the travel industry needs to safeguard its workforce with personal protective equipment, respirators, and eye protection.



About the Authors

Kumar Paramasivam
Vice President and Portfolio Head, Services

Samik Ghatak
Director - Client Services

Swaroop Janapareddy
Senior Project Manager

For more information, contact askus@infosys.com

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