

Why Technology Is The Key To Restarting Corporate Travel

As borders reopen and offices start to welcome back their employees, corporate travel and global mobility have kicked into gear once again.

But that's not to say that the pandemic experience of the sector has been one of eerie quietness as we sat back and waited for companies to press the restart button. During 2020, demand shifted as we still serviced a mission-critical layer of people needing to move around the world.

We are now seeing pent-up demand building as companies put into action delayed relocation plans, team restructuring, face-to-face meetings and global recruitment drives. A poll conducted in June among members of the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA) showed that domestic business travel is well on its way to recovery. 40% of respondents said that business travel within the country where their firm is based has already resumed, while a third said that their company has either decided on a start date or is working toward a date.

So the demand is there, but the question remains, how best can travel procurement and HR teams keep their customers and employees happy?

Corporate relocation has long been an industry slow to innovate and reinvent itself. Think of life before Concur as a comparison, manually inputting your expenses into a spreadsheet. The automation of this daily administrative process has been invaluable. In a similar vein, tech is the key to delivering corporate travel in a more efficient way but also in a way that improves the overall customer experience. Because ultimately, people deserve to feel at home, even when they're not.

Business Travel Trends

The state of corporate travel right now is intrinsically tied to how employees, employers and corporations view the future of work. The corporate landscape has changed irreversibly and how it all shakes out is still unclear.

Learning the new rules of engagement and navigating the current choppy waters of how to balance face-to-face with virtual meetings, team relocations during Covid and restructuring staff, will all be essential to companies' future economic outlook.

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However, certain trends are beginning to emerge and here I've listed my top five. All of these shifts are tied to the demographic change currently happening in corporate travel - millennials will make up more than half of the global workforce this year (according to Amex). Millennial habits and preferences will undeniably shape the adoption of change and technology in business travel going forward:

- 1. The Rise In Remote Working:** Be that as a digital nomad or as part of a larger organisation is a trend which is here to stay post pandemic. McKinsey concludes that "more than 20% of the workforce could work remotely three to five days a week as effectively as they could if working from an office". This massively depends on the type of work, of course, but "the virus has broken through cultural and technological barriers that prevented remote work in the past, setting in motion a structural shift in where work takes place, at least for some people". Tech has played a huge part as the great enabler of this shift (more on this later).
- 2. Bleisure:** Business travellers are almost always mixing work with pleasure nowadays. Travellers are extending their stays to bolt on vacation time or time with family.
- 3. Mixed Accommodation Types:** Younger business travellers are more open to staying in alternative lodging options from boutique hotels to vacation rentals and business travel has responded with a wider portfolio of options.
- 4. Compliance, Safety And Due Diligence:** Even more importance attached to these 3 core values in corporate relocation during uncertain times. Companies are looking for trusted booking partners to take them through the relocation process from start to finish. We vet the supply chain through



global databases - ensuring a provider in EMEA or APAC meets the stress tests applied here in the US. Only tech makes this possible.

5. Digital Native Travel Habits: Tech-centric travellers expect technology to be a part of their business travel experience as they use their devices for every other life action. Corporate travel is playing catch-up with leisure travel in terms of digital booking and that's why it's a sector ripe for tech enhancement.

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Tech Innovations Shaping The Future

The corporate travel procurement process is a complex beast, with many moving parts, particularly at this time with border challenges and variants still in action. I believe corporate travel procurement can be simplified and enhanced through tech. Here's how:

1. For Individuals: Tech by nature enables global connectivity as many workers switch to remote or hybrid models and choose to work and live more flexibly. Since the

pandemic, workers have adopted new ways of travelling and scheduling; all enabled by tech. When remote workers are staying away, tech steps in to improve the customer experience. Automation allows more control for accommodation providers.

For example, surveying guest satisfaction (reviews are like gold dust for repeat bookings) for instant, valuable communication with guests or programming and automating the communication flow to ensure a consistent experience, wherever a guest is staying.

2. For Companies: Tech innovations are making travel safer and more seamless for employees that need to do business again. For example, geotracking can track a company team all around the globe, whether employees are relocated or travelling short-term. Virtual concierge solutions reduce touchpoints in accommodation and trusted tech platforms find safe, comfortable accommodations worldwide. These innovations are needed in order to service the pent-up corporate demand for global mobility we identified earlier.

Tech is the natural way for corporations to streamline operations and undoubtedly increases the overall efficiency of corporate travel. Programmed and automated process flows are built into corporate travel booking platforms to meet specific employee needs and these can be revised and adapted to respond to ever changing requirements. Perhaps an employee needs to relocate with their family to a specific zip code for school district purposes or it's important that the apartment is located on a ground floor for accessibility reasons.

Enhancement Not Revolution

Tech is integral to the way corporate travel will operate in the future. However, there's a caveat. The hospitality touch is still equally important - and it's imperative we don't lose sight of that value as we go forward and innovate. The traveller experience is everything.

Some companies, such as ourselves, curate longer stays - 30, 60, 90 or more days at a time - for project or mobility relocations. When you go away from home, friends and family for this length of time, there's a higher emotional connection for the people involved. It can be stressful and worrying. Tech enhances the whole experience from booking your corporate travel, to the type of accommodation you choose, to ensuring your safety.

Our curation is connected to the machine but it's hybrid - you can't be hands off - so we always, always deliver a consistent experience. Of course, you won't have the same experience travelling for a Fortune 500 company to London or Paris or Dubai, but

you can have the same consistent customer experience. What this means is a comfortable stay - a vetted and reliable place to call home, a great bed, excellent WIFI connection, connected to a support team 24/7, etc.

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