

5 ways tech is changing business travel

Covid-19 has fuelled innovation in the travel industry. Though there has been a negative impact of border closures, flight restrictions, uncertainty and fear on the industry, but in the background, technology is advancing at a rapid pace - and transforming the traveller journey forever.



Source: Supplied

The role of tech is particularly significant for multinational companies around the globe for whom business travel is essential travel, for example, rotational workers providing services across the mining and energy sectors, or industry experts in the pharmaceutical and healthcare fields.

For many, travel has not stopped.

According to Bonnie Smith, general manager of FCM, digital advancements are answering the challenges laid down by the pandemic, and multinationals are using new technology and innovative booking platforms in order to:

1. Receive and share information

"From the latest travel restrictions, quarantine protocols and testing and/or vaccination requirements, the most valuable commodity in travel today is information," says Smith.

"Online booking tools have evolved to provide all the details you need right up front in the booking process. The latest facts or travel alerts are immediately highlighted for the travel booker – meaning they don't need to feel overwhelmed by the amount of information out there, or waste time looking for it."

According to Smith, while travel management companies (TMCs) have no control over border closures and red lists, they can control the end-to-end user experience, including how travellers access and view information.

"Interactive travel apps have become indispensable," says Smith. "Through the FCM Sam app, for example, we can ensure that any flight updates, changes, reminders or alerts instantly go to the traveller on their mobile device. And if they need support, even after hours, it's available at the touch of a button."

2. Improve traveller safety

Top of mind for any travel manager for the foreseeable future is duty of care. Companies today – more so than ever before – want to be able to track their travellers while they're on the road. They want to know exactly where their travellers are if they need to bring them back. And they look to their TMC to flag any potential risks, alert travellers (and the team back home) to any developments, and actively liaise with local consulates and embassies should the need arise.

Technology facilitates traveller safety. Think customised dashboards where travel managers can get an immediate snapshot of where their travellers are, including flight times, ETAs, accommodation, itineraries and more. Mobile alerts to inform travellers of any changes or incidents, apps with a 24/7 chat or call-back function so travellers can ask for advice and support any time, any place.

3. Personalise the user experience

The latest online booking tools (OBTs) use AI-enhanced technology, making them intuitive and hyper-personal.

For Smith, UX is more important than ever. "I know 'UX' has been a buzzword in the industry for a while, but the latest tech is game-changing. Not only does new AI technology add to the user experience by making quick recommendations based on your booking history, but new plug-and-play tech means we can create a universal FCM booking experience no matter where your offices are in the world.

"Whether you're booking travel from Asia or South Africa, using Concur or Cytric, your entire team can do the same things, access a wide range of travel content and information, and work in the same way", says Smith. "This is vital for multinationals with global travel programmes."

4. Increase visibility of spend and reporting

There's a growing trend to think more strategically about how travel expenses, payments, and reconciliation processes align with company-wide strategy and profitability goals.

Again, technology is paving the way. New functionality allows companies to analyse their travel behaviour, spend, bookings and programme compliance quickly and easily. You can now customise dashboards and pull up-to-the minute reports for cost analysis, budgeting and planning. Clear, concise data is no longer a pipe dream but a reality.

5. Meet sustainability goals

Millions of consumers (including travellers) around the world are actively seeking out products, services and experiences

that help them alleviate rising 'eco-shame'. Companies need to rise to the occasion by setting their own sustainability targets – and ensuring that everything from staff behaviour to suppliers and industry partners are aligned to their goals.

For Smith this means updating your travel management tech, so sustainability is front and centre in your travel programme.

"There are a number of different tools that companies can use today. These include carbon calculators to measure your climate footprint and carbon offsetting programmes to mitigate the impact of those emissions that you can't reduce," says Smith.

"Soon you'll be able to add filters that allow you to book flights in a more sustainable way, or choose greener accommodation options. You will even be able to choose the most environmentally-friendly route, which will be calculated on the distance between two locations and how many layovers are required. It's an exciting prospect," concludes Smith.

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