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Opinion

Disruptive trends that will transform the travel industry

Technology-driven trends will redefine the shape of the travel industry. Accelerated by the pandemic, they will soon revolutionize how the industry responds to changing situational and consumer requirements and also provide interested and innovative companies with avenues of growth and gain.

Words By Anil Parashar

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An unexpected pandemic has left the entire world in shock and completely changed the pace of development. Today, almost every industry is bearing the implications of our collective vulnerability and endeavouring day and night for survival or growth in this new reality. In this time, technology is emerging as a premium antidote to safeguarding industries and gloomy lives. How the travel sector is finally impacted and the ways it can embrace innovative inclusions still holds much for spectators to see. Nonetheless, it seems travel and tourism's relation with technology is no longer limited to personalization, optimization and acceleration. A whole new area of development in the name of advanced safety has now leapt forward. As visionaries, it is our duty to reimagine travel and tourism using technology or other methods. However, first and foremost, reopening borders and tourism-related businesses, and more importantly recreating demand are the evident challenges for the industry.

While travel seems to be gaining momentum through evolving ecosystems and air bubbles between relatively safe nations, there still remains a cloud of doubt amidst travellers. To bring back the omnipotent confidence in travel, there is an evident need for responsible collaboration and advancement in three areas - safer passenger journeys, enhanced traveller comfort and simplified travel metrics. Taking technology as the backbone of these advancements, we can build a plan for swifter recovery and growth in the industry. Both government and private enterprises in the industry need to work together to ensure that the end-traveller feels not only safe but also comfortable. For example, our government recently eased protocols for travellers to India by removing the obligation of registering with Indian missions before travelling. Such initiatives would help build tourism back, brick by brick.

With regards to how technology can assist enterprises in offering comfort and a safer experience while ensuring recovery for the industry, the following are my suggestions:

Smart Airports

In the age of smartphones, we in the aviation business are set to witness and eventually experience smart airports. With enhanced process efficiency and technologized safety protocols and

structures, smart airports will integrate digital dialect with intelligent platforms to provide advanced user experience. From smart gates to predictive analytics; advanced baggage tracking using blockchain technology to digital operational monitoring; smart security that deploys advanced biometric and AI for surveillance to bot connectivity (including UVD robots) and also operations that are mobile enabled- the mechanisms at both international and regional airports are poised for modernization. In a report by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, it is stated that in the next half-decade, airports will be deploying AI for scanning an astonishing 97 per cent of all passenger faces. That says a lot about the pool of opportunities that exist for numerous enterprises in the aviation sector. Such immense opportunities shall certainly bring greater value to businesses and the industry.

Intelligent Airplanes

After smart airports, one has to mention the intelligent airplanes that are expected to make an entry in this decade. As technologists test modern technologies, especially sensor technology for common use, many of us in the aviation industry for fear of being pandemic stricken may pick sensor technology as our ally to offer advanced touchless solutions in airplanes. Bot technology and artificial intelligence are other key technologies that will bring more intelligence to airplanes, quite like Alexa but customised for airplanes. Virtual reality, both as in-flight entertainment and as an experience enhancement solution is a slightly far bet for airplanes, yet an astounding possibility nonetheless. When looked at closely, this appears to be a great opportunity for travel businesses to use our nation's brilliant minds and recreate and reinvigorate the structure of airplanes or innovate and offer smart products and technologies that airlines simply could not refuse.

Personalized Passenger Journeys

Wearable technology today is a big leap towards modernizing passenger journeys to make them touchless and contactless. Tourism companies are emerging as advanced players here, using wearable devices and 'Internet of Things', such as sensors to alert travellers when their baggage is about to arrive at the carousel. Travel enablers in our industry may soon look at this as an opportunity to personalize alerts and notifications for travellers, for instance alerting a traveller who is approaching a COVID-19 hotspot.

Developing such technologies to offer more options and better personalized services to passengers will prove a major game-changer.

Consumer needs and demands, market sentiment, economic instability and growing impact of the pandemic have left travel and tourism struggling for survival but there is a vast reservoir of opportunities for us to explore and leverage. Technological advancement is only one of the ways of improving business. There are various additional solutions to accommodate changing consumer needs and ultimately boost travellers' confidence including personalized services, inter-industry and intra-industry collaborations, and redesigning the sales function, among other things. Ultimately it boils down to the individual business' rate of adaptivity and ability to act upon the changing external environment. The enterprises that can make the move and identify opportunities to build back, be it on the grounds of technology, personalization or innovation, will ultimately be the biggest gainers from the new opportunities that keep emerging irrespective of a pandemic.

About the author

Anil Parashar is the President and CEO of InterGlobe Technology Quotient (ITQ). ITQ is the official distributor of Travelport in six markets across the Asia Pacific region, including India and Sri Lanka, and provides cutting edge travel technology solutions with extensive inventory options to its customers. Prior to serving as President and CEO of ITQ, Parashar was Group CFO at InterGlobe Enterprises, a leading multi-billion dollar Indian conglomerate having interests in aviation, hospitality and other travel related services, perhaps best known for owning and operating Indigo Airlines. He is also a member of the group's executive committee and sits on the board of several InterGlobe companies, including ITQ and IndiGo.