

Emphasise on cross industry and cross business partnerships to boost inbound and outbound sales

A realistic, yet optimistic overview of how the travel industry and institutions should adapt, survive and re-emerge from the pandemic are much needed. In an exclusive interaction with TTJ, Sandeep Dwivedi, Chief Operating Officer, InterGlobe Technology Quotient, discusses varied topics that have resulted because of the disruption caused by the pandemic.

Prashant Nayak

With the second wave in progress, what according to you would be the actual timeline to achieve normalcy and recovery?

As the first pandemic of the 21st century, with no past records to relay a forecast, it is hard to state a vision of normalcy, especially when a vaccine hasn't entered the market yet. Even if that were the case, we are still slightly far from normalcy, as the current state of the market is not to change overnight. But to state my expectations for the upcoming year, it is likely that more people will choose to travel and engage in out-of-home activities now for having witnessed a range of safety measures undertaken both at individual and business level, and their affirmative responses. With more and more people gaining a sense of the risk and adopting the right measures to abate the risk, a steady pace of activities is expected to be achieved anywhere between the first and third quarter of 2021. If we look at a global scale, many economies are still struggling with the PMI (Purchasing Managers Index) in the service sector, for some it is staggeringly on the low side of 50, especially the European economies due to the latest restrictions levied across, including France and the UK. So, to achieve absolute normalcy, we need to wait and watch.

What does the vaccine announcement mean for the travel and tourism industry?

It is hopeful news indeed, but saying it would change the course entirely within months, would be peak optimism. Yes, the first wave of vaccine shall bring subtle faith in cross-border travel and may lead to the resumption of international travel, something many in the industry are eagerly waiting for. This shall bring tourism and related businesses back on their toes. It will further, albeit slowly, reinstate the flow in the hospitality sector. Business travel may also turn wheels, especially in the manufacturing sector, considering PMI in this sector is growing impressively. But the fact that a vaccine would not be immediately available to the masses poses its own detriments and may delay the progress. That does, however, indicate there will be progress



Sandeep Dwivedi

in a positive direction. Domestic aviation back to 80 percent of pre COVID numbers, India will continue to witness double-digit growth in aviation.

With standard hygiene SOP's put into practice almost everywhere, yet the threat still alive, according to you what is now most needed to reassure passenger safety and security post-COVID?

What SOPs have done is bring a rise in elements of value and instigate the use of new products and services by customers, thereby making them appreciative of the value proposition. As we move further in our fight against COVID, bringing an impressive rise in mobility, businesses shall need innovative ideas to convince more customers of safety in travel, including air travel which has better air circulation and HEPA filters. The long association of air travel and F&B will be the first to pick this race for reassurance. And businesses with more scientific reports to convince of safer consumption in a particular environment relative to business shall tread farther sooner than the others. For reassuring customers post COVID-19, again science and technology are going to play a major role, bringing innovations to the forefront. We will likely see advanced versions of airplane

filters and automated services that reduce human-to-human contact.

Technology has played a significant role during COVID. Tell us about the tech or infrastructure investments needed by the industry to bounce back?

There is a huge pool of opportunities in the SaaS (software-as-a-service) segment for the travel and tourism industry. So far, industries like healthcare and logistics have seen an upstart that has transformed SaaS within India to a multibillion-dollar industry with wide adoption by consumers, especially during the pandemic and lockdown. Today, we have a scope of leveraging this new wave in the travel sector with innovative software for airlines, airports, travel education and even travel trade. Investments are welcomed today in the automation sector as well, more so with robotics and 3D printing being in high demand. Wide deployment of AI in the sector shall prove immensely advantageous, especially in helping travellers find safer destinations to travel that are unlikely to be swarmed by people during a particular timeline.

Going into 2021, what support is needed for the survival and revival of the Indian travel and tourism industry?

Well, there is a new wave of optimism in the industry for having survived the worst few months in the history of travel and tourism. It is fair to highlight the distance we have covered from the first lockdown to this last month of 2020 with resilience and perseverance, despite much support. Yet, to speak of support, I cannot emphasise enough on the emerging need for cross-industry and cross-business partnerships to bring a safer travel environment for both inbound and outbound travellers, and F&B consumers in the hospitality sector. This cross-dimensional inter-industry support shall prove highly advantageous for businesses, including technology and travel business partnerships to offer advanced products and services to consumers, and bring more safety and comfort. The government should focus on a better tax regime and benefits to the travel industry by way of special status.