

What a difference a year makes

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Emma Woodhouse: Hello, and welcome back to another episode of business travel on the fly. The monthly podcast that dives into issues affecting those of us who usually spend time up in the air, out of the office and away from home on work trips, I'm Emma Woodhouse. Can you remember where you were this time last year? I was at my desk at a CWT office in London, speaking to a colleague about the Coronavirus epidemic that seemed to be growing in scale. I was looking out from the 31st floor over the city of London, it was teeming with commuters. I had no idea of the scope and scared of what would happen next. None of us did. This year has been hard. From the pandemic and it's tragic loss of human life, to an economic downturn that left millions of people without work. So many of us have experienced grief, anxiety and the pressure of balancing work and home life. We also experienced the loss of things we took for granted, things like chatting to a colleague face to face, looking over this fabulous city. Not long after that, the scope became clear and CWT kicked into gear as the global leader in digital business travel, hotel distribution and meetings and events. At the time, the company was processing 125 hotel bookings every minute and organizing 100 meetings and events every day. In less than 48 hours, a new messaging product was released with a single click cancellation button. When 1000s of counselors were sent home, CWT pulled together a VPN based home kit that allowed them to do the right thing for travelers in a monumentally difficult time safely. Two of the executives at the helm of transitioning the company and its clients and travelers through a global pandemic, our CFO and President Strategy and Transformation, Michelle McKinney- Frymire and Niklas Andreen, President Traveler Experience and Customer. Naturally we want to know what's next. A year on from a global shutdown. Vaccines are being rolled out, lockdowns raising and it feels like we're at the next fork in the road. What is the world of business traveling working life going to look like this time next year? First, let's hear from Michelle who believes that data will be a key component.

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Michelle McKinney- Frymire: I think data will be a critical part of travel management, even more so than it is today. A key part of the role of the TMC is managing and analyzing data at every stage of the journey, before, during and after travel. And how companies and organizations are able to collect and analyze data will definitely determine how well they restore and maintain confidence in travel as we see the pandemic subsiding. When you look at what has happened during the pandemic, it demanded a whole new layer of real time data be added to the way companies manage the health and safety of their employees. And now there's the added dynamic of health data, which I think will remain a big focus for years. TMCs will need to work with clients to strike the right balance between traveler personal safety and personal privacy. While industries and governments will need to work together on a common set of standards for processing digital health data, and giving travelers control and clarity about how that data is being used. It'll be even more important to clients that their employees are booking within policy, because it means that the client will know where their travelers are at any moment in time. Because any changes or

modifications to the itinerary are instantly available. Also within the global coverage and the 24/7 service that a provider like CWT can offer, that'll mean keeping bookings within a preferred channel will allow clients or CWT to reach travelers anytime that's needed and for the traveler to reach an agent wherever they are in the world for support if something does go wrong. Fundamentally, human connection remains critical to our society. And returning to travel will be a process that demands expertise, empathy and a strong focus on well being. The human impact of COVID and its legacy on behavior will last long after vaccines have been rolled out and quarantines and lockdowns have been lifted. I think TMCs will need to guide companies on how to capture and analyze the right data, while at the same time respecting the rights of the individual traveler.

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Emma Woudhouse: Niklas manages customer interactions as well as global sales and ultimately make sure that customers get to where they need to save and sound, which in these extraordinary times is no mean feat. Nicholas manages the travel process all the way from pre trip approval to post trip. He told me about the behavior changes we can expect to see.

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Niklas Andreen: So we're a year into this now. And I think what's amazed me is really the resilience of business. People make things work, and they get on with their business and get business done. And we've got another tool in our toolbox, whether it's WebEx meetings, Zoom meetings or other alternatives to be able to interact. And I don't think that's going to replace everything else, it's just another alternative. So I think when it comes to travel, what we're gonna see is, there's a hunger to get back to meet people. You can't initiate relationships, have difficult negotiations, or other things like that online. But of course, you can do some of the easy one to one meetings, if you have historically flown to London for your meeting, and then back home, you may replace that with a video conferencing. Just like at one point in time, phone calls were replaced the written letters for some correspondence. But we still kept the written letters, that got supplemented by email, phone calls got supplemented by video. And now we have a whole toolbox of alternatives for ourselves.

Hybrid is another great example of the innovation and the creativity that comes out of these things. Because we used to have, either everyone was on a phone conference, or everyone was meeting together, I think the new breed of hybrid meetings just brings a whole new dimension to doing business. It allows us to increase the number of people that can participate in big meetings, because you don't have to fly everyone in to attend that meetings. And both from a climate perspective. And from a business continuity perspective, you can have a small group in place, but actually spread the message much easier across the entire organization. It also gives you capabilities of bringing in solutions that you potentially couldn't bring in, in an in person meeting. So for me, the hybrid meeting is really the evolution of the meetings and event space, which has historically been very binary, it was either literally a phone conference, or bring everyone in on location.

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Emma: I also asked Niklas about the role of the travel management company and how it's going to evolve.

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Niklas Andreen: The pandemic has showed the true value of a travel management company, but the true value of a travel manager as well, because it is really that partnership of helping a company effectively manage the travel of their employees, not their travelers. It's about helping the employees feel safe and sound even before they book a travel knowing that they can go traveling, knowing what the restrictions are, and knowing what they need to do to be able to travel. It's the classic historical letting them get to the location in the right way. But it's also during that journey, making sure you're available for them, whether that's a change ticket a rebooking, or God forbid, they end up in a situation where they need help such as you know, SOS or, or get sick on the journey. All the way until they get come back home, can hand in their expenses, and go back to being an employee working from home or office. For the company, the travel management company is becoming increasingly important because it's yes, not about administrating bookings. It's about making sure you provide the data and the infrastructure to effectively manage that program, not just to save cost and optimize the cost side of it. But to optimize what you deliver in terms of the employee feeling around getting on the road on behalf of your business. And last but not least, it's about making sure as a Travel Manager, you can have all the data at your fingertips in real time to understand how you can support and help your travelers throughout the world in the uncertain times we live in. So talking to our clients and our customers and their travelers, the feedback that's coming back is really about an increased focus on the support before you do the booking, whether that is the approval system, or that is making sure that have the relevant data through things like our travel essential offer to know that I'm Swedish traveling from Stockholm, to the US what is the restrictions what I need to do what I need to prepare in order to be successful on that journey. Secondly, there's an increased discussion around effectively managing the program and getting the real time data to be able to understand where you have travelers, how that ties into the restrictions in different countries. So you can get an overview of the risk you're exposing your employees to when they're traveling. So you can help them mitigate that and make sure that they can get to where they need to, do their business, come back home safe and sound and be ready to take on the next journey to help drive your business forward. The other part that is becoming really significant is the importance of hotels, of course, because quite often you're on a flight or you're on a journey, but you actually stay for multiple days in a location And so that's why things like Roomit and all the functionality that we bring in order to highlight where your property is, whether that is extra clean, and the safety and concern parts around it really helps travelers feel comfort when it comes to the staying part of their journey, not just the traveling part of that journey. And that's when you as an employee, truly feel like your company takes care of you as an employee, not just as a traveler that they hope come back once you've finished your business.

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Emma Woudhouse: There's hope on the horizon and lasting and positive change to look forward to. Our mid February research found that a staggering 58% of frequent business travelers have their passport at the ready. As we continue to evolve our consumer grade experience. Stick with us as we navigate the future. Subscribe to business travel on the fly on Apple podcast, Spotify, Google Play and wherever you get your podcasts.