

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

How technology can alleviate travelers' concerns and boost demand

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The Four Seasons app lets guests check in digitally. Image credit: Four Seasons

By SARAH RAMIREZ

Leveraging technology will be crucial for luxury hospitality brands to help consumers feel confident about resuming travel amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

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Nearly a year into the pandemic, consumers still have several concerns about traveling. According to the "[Rethink Travel Global Survey](#)" from Amadeus, 84 percent of consumers report technology would increase their confidence in traveling the next 12 months.

The study was based on a September survey of more than 6,000 respondents from France, Germany, India, Singapore, the United Kingdom and the United States who have traveled in the past 18 months.

"Whether it is new mobile applications, biometrics or contactless solutions, we need to explore together as an industry and with governments how best to accelerate adoption if we are to encourage global travel, which is a major driver of global prosperity," said Christophe Bousquet, chief technology officer at Amadeus. "By giving travelers easy access to the information they need to be assured of their safety while traveling, and giving them tools that address their individual preferences, we can build traveler confidence and speed up recovery."

Combating travel worries with tech

More than four in 10 travelers, 43 percent, are concerned about the increased risk of catching or transmitting the virus while traveling. Between 30 and 40 percent of respondents also cited other concerns such as government-imposed quarantines, being stranded, mixing with crowds and reduced enjoyment due to restrictions or closures.

Only 26 percent of travelers are worried about losing money due to cancellations, as many airlines and hotels have introduced more flexible booking and refund policies.



A third of U.K. travelers feel more confident if they have the ability to use mobile boarding. Image credit: Walpole

Generational and geographical differences are apparent in respondents' varying concerns.

Baby Boomers are most worried about being able to socially distance, while millennials tend to be more concerned about hygiene and sanitation standards.

Fifty-four percent of travelers in Singapore and 42 percent of French travelers are concerned about facing quarantines, either at destinations or after returning home. Only 27 percent of travelers in the U.S. are concerned about government quarantines.

According to Amadeus, the five most-cited conditions for consumers to feel comfortable traveling are flexible change and cancellation policies; limiting plane passengers; being able to socially or physically distance throughout the journey; visible assurance of sanitization and safety measures and effect testing, tracking and tracing programs.

Thirty percent of respondents need technology to limit human contact, queues and physical touchpoints so they can feel comfortable traveling. Three in 10 also want on-trip notifications to alert if there is a localized outbreak or changes in government guidance.

Travelers want technology advancements and offerings that can help reduce congestion, minimize face-to-face contact, relay information about delays and ensure the accuracy of testing and tracing programs.

Lesser priorities for travelers harnessing technology are reaching support agents and reducing the need for physical documents.

Smartphones and mobile applications are the most accessible ways for travel brands to introduce technologies that will assuage consumer concerns, such as COVID-19 alerts, contactless payments and mobile boarding passes.



A UV robot used at the Waldorf Astoria Beverly Hills. Image credit: BHCVB

More than a third of travelers would feel more confident with the availability of self-service check-ins and automated cleaning processes, such as robots. Respondents would also feel confident if travel providers implemented facial recognition technology, 30 percent; self-scanning luggage, 29 percent; and voice recognition technology, 20 percent.

Just as generational and geographical differences inform travelers' concerns, it also impacts how receptive travelers are to different uses of technology.

Millennials are most interested in touchless technology, while Baby Boomers most value on-trip notifications. More than a third of travelers from the U.K. and Germany would be more willing to travel if there are contactless payment experiences, while 47 percent of U.S. consumers are more willing to travel if information about COVID is fully available throughout the process.

Luxury applications

Luxury hotel groups have often at the forefront of experimenting with mobile technology to better engage with guests, and this has become even more important during the ongoing pandemic.

For instance, Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts is investing further in its mobile application and chat that allow guests to control how they engage with others, limiting face-to-face interactions while maintaining personal service. The app features include booking and managing reservations, requesting luggage pickup, airport transfers, room service, restaurant and spa reservations ([see story](#)).

Voice technology is also likely to play a role in limiting face-to-face interactions and promote social distancing.

Hotel group Marriott International has harnessed voice technology to provide a more interactive guest experience at its properties. Guests at select properties in Marriott Hotels, Westin Hotels & Resorts, St. Regis Hotels & Resorts, Aloft Hotels and Autograph Collection Hotels will be able to use Alexa's voice technology to access services and amenities ([see story](#)).

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