



DIGITALLY ENABLING BUSINESS TRAVEL

CWT CTO REVEALS THAT DIGITAL PLATFORMS ARE
AUGMENTING THE RETURN TO CORPORATE TRAVEL

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Digital methods largely replaced corporate travel for the initial years of the 2020s, but it is digital methods that are ensuring that corporate travel is safe, both for the travelling employee and the employer. A business that could lay claim to having invented travel management is CWT. CTO John Pelant reveals that the pandemic and the post-pandemic economy is embedding digitisation into business travel to help organisations lower their carbon footprint, meet partners and clients and end the privations of the pandemic.

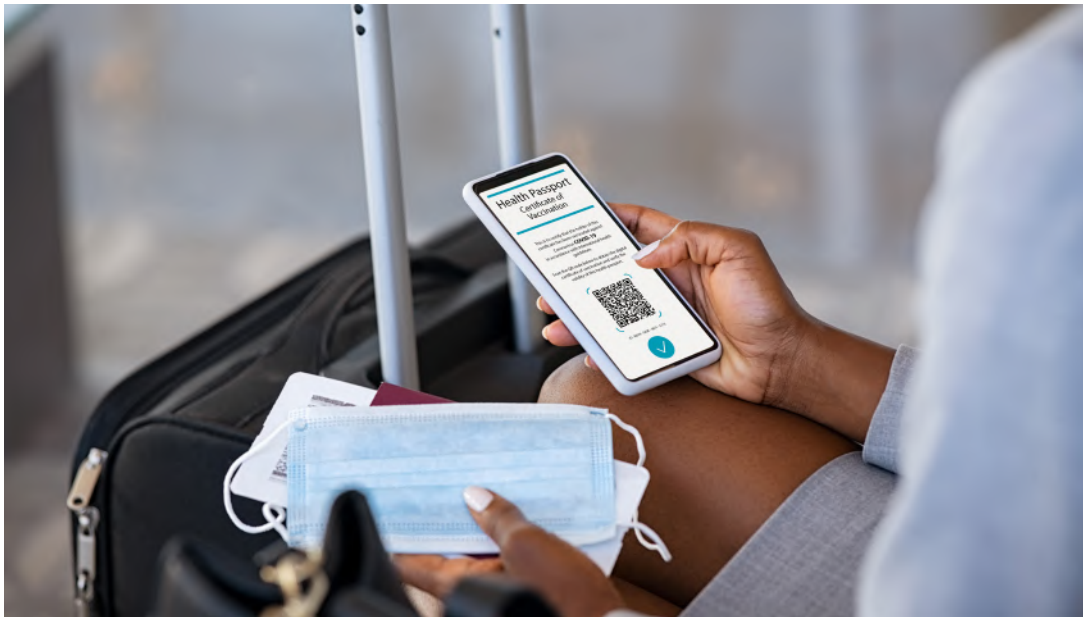
“As travel starts to rebound, and the return is significant, digitisation has become critical.” But it’s not just about the technology; the CTO says: “We reference people and technology, and that is the best mix. There will likely always be a human element. What technology provides is the data that ensures that we can give information to travel managers.” Pelant says that CWT focuses on ‘know me and value me’ for the traveller.

DEALING WITH DISRUPTION

“There are always disruptions, and this was a very different scale,” Pelant says of the Covid-19 pandemic. “Covid-19 brought about a heightened level of focus on health. That focus is what we bring to our customers; we take away a lot of the mystery,” Pelant says of how its applications, such as Travel Essentials, guide a business traveller through different levels of restrictions that post-Covid travel has in place.

“People want face-to-face, but the frequency will change, and we have to enable that by providing the customer with value,” he adds of how despite the rise of video conferencing and online collaboration during the pandemic lockdowns, business relies on physically meeting. “We have seen how the connection is very much there, and with recent world events, it is even more important to stay connected.”

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The pandemic lockdowns not only put health at the forefront of business travellers' minds but also the health of the planet. Again, travel management companies and their digitisation strategies are able to respond to new demands from travel managers and travellers. "We have seen a significant upturn in sustainability demands and therefore how we partner with our customers," he says. Partnerships with startup labs in Silicon Valley and across the world have enabled CWT to discover, sometimes back and integrate with digital services that help travel managers keep their

team members travelling, but with a lower carbon footprint. CWT has partnered with Thrust Carbon, a startup from London that was launched in 2019. In partnership with Thrust Carbon, CWT is now able to digitally inform travel managers at the point of sale of the carbon footprint of both a flight and hotel. "We will provide more information on rail and car travel in the near future. It is about allowing the employee and the organisation to make these choices; it is an exciting time," Pelant says. "It is empowering for an employee and employer, so they can both see that they are making a difference.

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“Our employees want to make sure that we are making a difference too,” he says of how environmental impact demands are both internal and external factors on the organisation.

NEW LEADERSHIP MODELS

Pelant, like most peers in a CXO role, is well aware that purpose, actions and leadership are vital to any organisation looking to retain and recruit digital talent. “I think we feel the pressure like many firms as technology is the core of the business. The purpose piece becomes really critical, and we make sure that we have really challenging and interesting technology problems for people to solve.” Pelant says many technologists are driven by a desire to problem-solve, both as a technology team but also as an organisation. “How are you trying to change an industry? That is what interests really strong technologists.”

In a globalised community that is now acutely aware of the perils of climate change, Pelant believes keeping that community connected whilst protecting the planet is a global challenge that CWT can “really make a difference” in. “They want to know they are making a difference as an organisation, and it is key that you communicate that difference,” he says. The CTO adds it is important for CXOs to support team members in their own endeavours to make a difference outside

of CWT. “Each of these are pieces of the recruitment and retention puzzle so that we think of our technologists and employees as people,” he says.

“I feel as a leader I always lead with making sure that people are doing ok, but not as much as I did over the last couple of years,” he says of how post-pandemic, CXOs must be holistically caring in their leadership. “Asking how you are doing is meant in a very different way now; the connection is very different,” he reflects.

The pandemic and rise of remote working has given many CXOs access to talent that was not previously available. “Through this pandemic, the world has become more borderless, so people have more ability to work at a variety of different firms, and that plays both ways. There is more pressure to retain our top people, but we also have a greater ability to pull from a larger pool of talent,” he says.

Pelant describes CWT as a business with a technological core, and in recent years there has been a constant stream of new technology-oriented services for travel managers and travellers to use. As a result, the CTO must ensure that new developments don't leave technology debt in place, which can increase costs and cause barriers to innovation. Best defined as a technical decision made at a point in time

to either achieve a short-term outcome or solve an instant problem, that decision becomes a technical debt to the business in the longer term.

“The pace that firms evolve at means technical debt is part of our history, and it is something we are very active on. When I do capital planning, I make sure that we carve out a piece of the budget for maintenance, compliance and dealing with technical debt. That provides a greater efficiency,” he says.

This is especially important for a global organisation; the CTO says: “We really do have to focus on configuration so that

rather than building one-offs, we have a global platform, and that has cleaned up a lot of technical debt.” Pelant says CXOs must tackle technical debt because, despite the technical-sounding name, the main concern with technical debt is its impact on the business. “You can have technical items out there that may not cost much to keep running, but they do take away brain power, and I want to keep my team focused on the current and the future.”

Pelant has been with CWT for over 20 years, and his career journey has included responsibilities for product development and IT operations.





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