

**HCL**

# The 'New Normal' in Airline

The Impact of COVID-19 and beyond



COVID-19 has brought a change that might just be here for some time. The new norm of social distancing has impacted the way we travel.

Things have changed and airlines, being one of the foremost industries that got impacted, need to think of ways to bounce back. World Economic Forum says that restrictions on international flights will cost the airline industry an alarming \$880 billion. Difficult times call for serious introspection and re-calibration. As an earlier adapter to change, airlines should build assurance for both travelers and employees to handle this.

## The future of airlines would largely depend on the following:



### Health and Safety

Real-time, integrated communication with Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and World Health Organization (WHO) on development and mutation of COVID-19 to undertake proactive on-ground and in-flight measures.

This will help airlines to classify each route category. It is important to understand the risk of exposure, and thereafter, mitigating the same to service such routes. Change in route category will be a common practice subject to the rate of local transmission, passenger load, and the duration of the flight.

Airlines should collaborate with airports to map complete passenger journeys from the time they enter an airport to the time they exit another. The availability of basic sanitization stations along with masks and gloves should be a mandate. Penalties should be imposed on misconduct and/or non-compliance.

# Assure that 'We-Will-Fly-Again'

## Airline Employees

Social distancing is the baseline of control and prevention of the COVID-19 outbreak. Training techniques will see a change from the standard classroom curriculum to newer health-safety standards for both passengers and crew.

Airlines may look at engaging employee digitally through



E-learning for cabin crew refresher training



Interactive web-based safety training session



eBook on changes to existing services and/or on-board requirement

This will help airlines achieve faster and cost-effective crew qualification turnaround, to operate flights post-COVID pandemic on the basis of new regulations.

Providing free personal protective equipment (PPE) on high or medium risk level flights, with increased frequency of medical and flight-ready tests for employees will also be a key driver.

Such gestures of a good work-environment will build confidence among employees to return with 100% commitment.

## Airline Customers

It is critical for airline customers to feel comfortable when getting on a plane. Airlines should provide the following basic checks:



Access to masks and sanitizers



In-flight video or display of social distancing and updated in-flight protocols



Zero cancellation and rebooking charges



Temperature check before and after flights



Load base seat map availability grid



Back-to-front boarding process to reduce customers' instances to passing by one another



Deep cleaning the aircraft after every operation leg



Precaution testing at airports on a chargeable basis

## Loyalty Management

Loyalty management should be relooked with a renewed focus on innovation and simplification. This might include the following:



Extending loyalty tier for members



Special incentives to encourage loyalty members to book and travel (i.e., additional points, priority boarding, excess baggage, etc.)



Flexibility to redeem points throughout airline supplier, retail, or hotel partners



Extension on priority boarding and unused refreshment coupons



Complimentary travel insurance

## Communication

Airlines and airports are shared spaces where we have to be considerate of others around us. Timely communication on new travel protocols is important. Airlines may follow the below communication pattern:



Email reminders of new guidelines to cover mouth and nose while traveling



Check-in/bag drop signage on new travel CDC guidelines



Boarding gate display to communicate social distancing along with hygiene requirement by CDC



In-flight entertainment to display a constant thumbnail of covering mouth and nose

COVID-19 has changed things. However, the airline industry has always come out of difficult times. This time will also pass. The future of airline industry would depend on managing the above keeping in mind the industry integrity and customer sentiments.

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