5 QUESTIONS FOR THE
WORLD AVIATION FESTIVAL 2020

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This year's World Aviation Festival is unlike any other – being hosted virtually amid one of the greatest crises the aviation industry has ever faced. So many questions have arisen in the wake of COVID-19 – around safety, space and technology. Here are the top five questions we think need to be asked and which we think could stimulate broader discussions ahead of the Festival.

1 How, what, why and when will we be able to trust again?

The existential nature of the COVID-19 pandemic has brought with it a deterioration in trust between customers, people in general, companies and governments. This is particularly evident right now, while a vaccine remains some time away and we are relying on those around us to simply *'do the right thing(s)'* – which is as broad and uncertain as it sounds.

Even if we have a vaccine, the question of trust will still be there and probably lead to more questions. How will we know what vaccine the person sat next to us on a plane has taken? How will we know if they've been vaccinated at all? Can we even trust the app that the airline is using to trace or share information?

These questions extend to airports and governments too as we all become that bit more concerned about the standards to which airports are cleaned how fast ACI World accreditations will be adopted. Governments around the world are scrutinizing and in some cases barring flights from other countries, sometimes while taking different approaches to the crisis domestically. This is all contributing to feelings of uncertainty and confusion amongst travellers.

The road to regaining trust will be a long one, incorporating new and different players as well as channels. But it is a road that the industry must face quickly in order to survive.

2 Do we have the technology to handle this crisis or are we still developing it?

From the moment COVID-19 was declared a pandemic, countries, governments, airports and tech companies began deliberating over the role that technology could play in aiding testing for the virus. The process of tracking and tracing the virus as it spread; the sharing

of information on hotspots, guidance and more have all become part of the public coping mechanism in the hope that this will get us back towards normal routines and daily life.

Many options have arisen in the last 6 months – with over 300 COVID-19 apps currently in circulation and tests of various kinds delivering results in seconds to hours with varying quality. These kinds of variations not only reveal gaps in our current capabilities but also around the accuracy of the technological solutions, let alone the potential of reinfections.

There is no doubt technology will continue to be essential in tackling and containing the pandemic as we move forward – but we must then ask ourselves what an acceptable form or level of risk management might look like that could get people flying again. More advanced vetting for certain passengers – a common process in all other parts of air travel – could be one route; is it possible that health screening will be the logical extension to this?

3 How important will standardisation be in the years to come when change in the industry is slow to take hold?

Looking at our two previous questions, there is one other issue which seems to present a natural next step for tackling the crisis – that is the need for standardisation.

With hundreds of apps for COVID-19 already in circulation, and governments and airports taking different approaches, a single (or set) of standards will become crucial not just in managing and mitigating the pandemic – but in re-building trust too.

Some of the current apps hold information on an individual's health status, others replace paper declarations that document where a traveller is going and the last time they had a COVID-19 PCR test. To make the tracking and contact tracing aspect of containing the spread of the virus robust, these apps require a take-up rate of 60-70% of the population. Right now, the variations between nations makes this challenging to say the least, and that is without getting into the issues around technical limitations.

The history of the aviation industry suggests standardisation and interoperability will be a slow process. We need only look to past changes – following hijackings in the 1960s or the introduction of banking technology, for example – to see that developments in security or technology can take years to reach standardisation and even longer to really take hold around the world. The question is, do we currently have the time for developments to take that long?

4 How will our lifestyles have to change and can we ever go back to where we were?

The COVID-19 crisis turned everyone's lives and routines on their head – forcing us to change the way we shop, see friends and family and move around the world. Even post-vaccine many of these routines might remain in place or have to change again. That will apply to airports and how we fly.

It is certainly possible that passengers will be asked to provide more information pre-flight – whether that's a temperature check or a blood test – but we do not yet know how they, how we will respond to that. Passengers may be understanding of the situation right now , but will that still be the case two or three years from now?

And, what how about moving through airports? Depending on the region, up to 40% of airport revenues depend on non-aero (i.e., passenger) income, with some airports in Asia and London being more like luxury shopping malls. This raises questions around potential changes to or reductions in shared touch-points for travellers throughout the airport. Finding new revenue sources, or diversify existing ones will certainly remain an ongoing concern for airports.

5 Is this catalyst for change allowing us to create more flexible and adaptable airports that are prepared for uncertain times?

Perhaps amidst this crisis there is an opportunity to change and to have more resilient aviation for our current pandemic as well as the next set of threats. Since we may never return to where we were pre-COVID, perhaps we can go somewhere better – somewhere better prepared for an uncertain future. After all, climate change and its impacts have not disappeared from the agenda.

There is a balance to be struck here between change by necessity and change by opportunity.

We do not know how long certain social distancing, isolation and quarantine measures will remain in place. But, there may be a need to free up space in airports to accommodate them in a long-term capacity. This will force some airports to re-think their spaces to become more flexible and to change out of necessity.

But there is also change by opportunity – allowing us to rethink the need for airline check-in systems for boarding passes as well as every other contact point in the airport system. The early promise of biometrics could provide a solution to this – and the possibility of freer, smoother movement through airports. Whilst it wasn't created as a solution to a pandemic, biometrics could be a happy by-product of the technology, removing touch-points for travellers and freeing up space once taken up by physical gates and barriers around airports to accommodate social distancing or other measures. Commercial opportunities are also supported to provide faster touch-free selling in airport retail.

However you look at it, change is definitely on the cards – but how do we define it and carry it forward at a pace that will meet the challenges of our time? This is something the industry must answer.

To find out more and to get answers to some of the big questions in aviation, join me at the

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where I would be happy to discuss these and other topics.