



10 BUSINESS TRAVEL TRENDS FOR 2019

Presented by

Skift. + **TripActions**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is a time of dynamic change in corporate travel. In 2019, the industry appears poised for continuing growth and expansion worldwide. Influential factors include a general climate of optimism and economic stability, a robust international meetings sector, and increasing non-stop flight options. More people are venturing around the globe in pursuit of commercial ambitions than ever before.

Within this expanding business travel sphere, a spirited new road warrior class is emerging. Eager, even impatient, to book their next trip, they are helping create a new mindset and attitude about the value of the corporate travel experience. And emboldened by today's consumer travel tools and technologies, they are assertively challenging the status quo, both in terms of trip planning and itinerary management. They are even helping to shift the standard corporate rules related to human resources, impacting everything from recruiting and retention to overall job satisfaction and sense of purpose.

Who is this new breed of corporate traveler? What is driving their quest for independence? And how are corporate travel managers and travel suppliers responding? There are a number of overarching themes that are likely to impact the decision making of these stakeholders in the coming year.

First, employee perception of business travel is dramatically shifting. For younger generations especially, the opportunity to travel for work is a job prerequisite. Once hired, they want to travel as much as possible, both for personal empowerment and advancement, and in order to best support the company's objectives. For them, travel is increasingly synonymous with personal and professional satisfaction.

Yet many feel that outdated corporate travel tools and policies are clipping their wings, if not outright grounding their ambitions. Increasingly accustomed to the freedom of mobile apps and sharing economy services like Lyft from their consumer lives, they want the same for their business travel experiences. When forced to then use less-flexible corporate tools, they feel yoked.

How to resolve this tension? Is there a middle ground for corporate travel managers to give employees the freedom they seek while adhering to necessary and important budgetary, compliance, insurance, and duty of care considerations?

This report tries to predict ten business travel trends that Skift and TripActions believe will continue to shape this new reality in 2019. It also emphasizes the best path for organizations to follow as they attempt to evolve their corporate travel management standards to meet the demands and expectations of tomorrow's road warrior while reliably meeting business requirements and standards.

Ultimately it starts with adopting a fresh "people-first" perspective on business travel, one that puts the overall wellbeing and satisfaction of the employee ahead of policy and program considerations.

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ABOUT SKIFT

Skift is a travel intelligence company that offers news, data, and services to professionals in travel and professional travelers, to help them make smart decisions about travel.

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EXECUTIVE LETTER

Dear reader,

When it comes to establishing and growing the relationships that drive businesses forward, there's simply no substitute for connecting in person. Ultimately, the importance of these face-to-face connections is the very reason business travel exists. It's time for us to harness the latest technologies to power these in-person relationships so we can continue driving business growth.

To make the most of the opportunities business travel affords, travelers should arrive at their destinations feeling rested, focused, and ready to connect. But corporate business travel programs are largely outdated, frustrating employers and employees alike. Unfortunately business travel today is fraught with pain points that lead to low traveler adoption and compliance rates, incomplete visibility into travel spend and difficulty delivering duty of care.

This is all in contrast to consumer travel sites and apps, which have made advancements that make booking travel simple and user-friendly. This disconnect between the consumer travel experience and business travel experience is aggravating those simply trying to travel for work. As we usher in an increasingly technology-driven generation of road warriors, these higher standards challenge the industry to focus more intensely on the user.

At TripActions, we're on a mission to power the in-person connections that move people, ideas and businesses forward. We know that travel plays a critical role in helping the most innovative companies, like Lyft, Dropbox and Robinhood, achieve their growth objectives and stay a step ahead of the competition.

With this report, we urge the industry to keep these emerging trends in mind as we all work together to make business travel a delightful experience for everyone.

Sincerely,
Ariel Cohen
CEO and Co-Founder, TripActions

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INTRODUCTION



These are flourishing times for corporate travel. According to the World Bank, international travel departures have more than doubled from roughly 600 million to 1.3 billion over the last two decades. The GBTA Foundation, the education and research foundation of the Global Business Travel Association, predicts a \$1.6 trillion business travel market by 2020.

The main driver of the current growth, which the GBTA predicts could expand to \$1.7 trillion by 2022, is improving economic conditions around the globe. Led by the Chinese and U.S. markets, the GBTA's top 15 "stalwarts" currently generate roughly half of today's global business travel spending. Adding to this upward trajectory is the meetings and events sector, another driver of growth and optimism. In November 2018, the Washington, D.C.-based Events Industry Council (EIC) estimated that business events generated \$621.4 billion of direct GDP and contributed a total global GDP impact of \$1.5 trillion in 2017.

But perhaps the best news about business travel is that its impact extends far beyond the bottom line. Companies across all industries are increasingly discovering that corporate travel programs are a critical asset underpinning their organization's success and growth — supporting employee recruitment and retention efforts, boosting productivity, and creating the right “esprit de corps” among the workforce.

But even as companies increasingly recognize the impact of business travel on their balance sheet and employees, outdated programs, policies, and tools are holding many companies back from realizing their true business travel potential. The most obvious obstacle is the employee friction that has long been a part of the business travel process. Challenges such as time away from home and family, the fatigue of multi-leg trips across different time zones, and delays and cancellations, are time-honored realities.

Compounding the challenge is the fact that employees are demanding more flexible business travel policies, and better tools. For many, “better” means the superior utility, friendliness, and convenience of consumer travel websites and apps. As they grow more accustomed to self-planning and managing their personal travel experiences using these tools, they now want the same for their business lives. Luckily, a range of new technologies, programs, and services now offer more control over every phase of the travel experience.

Unfortunately, not all corporate travel managers are keeping up with this emerging business travel culture. Traditional thinking focused on rules and policy enforcement continues to endure, frustrating the ambitions of this newly empowered road warrior class. Worst of all, these outdated rules tend to put people last, often making them “go rogue” and ignore company policy.

With the balance of power shifting to the business traveler, and significant company expenses at stake, corporate travel policy must embrace a more people-first attitude. How can organizations reconcile the growing tensions introduced by changes in traveler habits and disruptive technologies?

TripActions, a technology-enabled corporate travel management platform, believes that meeting the demands of both employees and employers is possible through systems that can deliver on the aforementioned people-first attitude. TripActions' 2018 State of Business Travel Report, which surveyed 2,900 business travelers, found that a new attitude and mentality about corporate travel is emerging. Younger professionals especially are embracing travel as a benefit, and as a vehicle for self-empowerment, career advancement, and business success.

And with 2019 on the horizon, Skift partnered with TripActions to identify and further explore the trends most likely to have the biggest impact in business travel in the year ahead, placing special focus on themes connected to taking a more people-centric approach of business travel.

These are the top 10 trends:

- 1.** The sharing economy moves into the C-suite
- 2.** Small and medium-size companies get a seat at the table
- 3.** Business travelers demand an end-to-end experience
- 4.** Mixing business and leisure is here to stay
- 5.** Business travel evolves to become people-first
- 6.** Corporate travel gets smarter about blending AI and machine learning technology with a human touch
- 7.** The continued power of face-to-face meetings
- 8.** The rise of “innovational” travel in the meetings sector
- 9.** Moving from points to personalization
- 10.** CFOs play a greater role in business traveler happiness

We'll take a closer look at each of these themes in “10 Business Travel Trends for 2019,” presented by Skift and TripActions, offering predictions for how this sector will evolve in 2019 and beyond.

1. THE SHARING ECONOMY MOVES INTO THE C-SUITE



It's no surprise that sharing economy services like Airbnb and Lyft have earned growing acceptance among business travelers. However, from the perspective of corporate travel managers who oversee policy decisions, the use of these services has historically been the exception rather than the rule. Many organizations did not have expense account functions set up to easily approve such transactions, and very frequently, sharing economy inventory was not surfaced in employee travel booking searches. That's now starting to change, as executive-level corporate travel decisionmakers and sharing economy companies continue to professionalize their services, further integrating them into existing corporate travel platforms.

The principal reason for this shift is the changing habits of business travelers. In fact, sharing economy leaders like Lyft and Airbnb are continuing to mature from niche disruptors into mainstream leaders for both consumers and business travelers alike. A 2018 Skift study of the ridesharing habits of U.S. business travelers, completed in partnership with Lyft, found ridesharing in high demand. More than 79 percent of respondents chose ridesharing as their first ground transport choice ahead of taxis, rental cars, and car services, citing ease of use (86 percent of respondents), simplicity of payment (65 percent), and low cost (41 percent).

In 2019, this organic groundswell of sharing economy adoption among business travelers is likely to be matched by growing efforts to further formalize and integrate such services into corporate travel policy and tools. More than 90 percent of Skift respondents said their organization now permits ridesharing services for business trips.

Does your employer allow you to use ridesharing services when traveling for work?



Source: Skift's 2018 Business Travel Ridesharing Habits Survey

In fact, with a growing set of corporate-travel friendly sharing economy services now available to companies, such as automatic expensing for business users from Uber, Lyft, and Airbnb, the path to integration into corporate policy is already being established. In fact, Lyft Business has thousands of corporate clients, including major players such as Disney, JetBlue, Salesforce, and Hertz.

Interviews with executives that oversee such policy decisions confirm the shift toward increasing integration of sharing economy companies. "Our organization has been very progressive in this area," said Visit Seattle's vice president of sales and services Kelly Saling, who travels throughout North America on behalf of the bureau, and internationally for leisure. "We have corporate accounts with both Uber and Lyft that are integrated into each employee's device. No permissions are required, and billing is to the corporate card. Having that roll up into an automated expense is worth its weight in gold."

While slower to advance, alternative lodging options such as homesharing are also gaining measurable traction, especially among Millennial and Gen Z employees. More than one-third (36 percent) of respondents in this bracket surveyed in the TripActions 2018 State of Business Travel Report said they book Airbnb-type accommodations, along with boutique hotels, as part of "fulfilling their desire for unique travel experiences."

Recognizing the need to provide greater confidence with travel managers and corporate travelers, Airbnb is now further expanding and formalizing its corporate travel service offering. Now called Airbnb for Work, the platform includes a dashboard for tracking traveling employees and eliminating expense reports. And in September 2018, Airbnb for Work announced it had integrated Airbnb Experiences and curated lists of meeting-appropriate homes into its business travel booking platform. Launched in April 2018, Airbnb for Events allows meeting planners to create an interactive map of Airbnb-listed properties within reach of the event venue for attendees seeking alternative lodging. The company is also leveraging its map-based technology for other meetings industry uses, such as event registration and management.

The expanding acceptance of sharing economy services is not limited to accommodations or transportation, either. In fact, a growing network of coworking and remote work service providers is also rapidly integrating itself into the corporate travel booking ecosystem. Airbnb cemented a partnership with coworking brand WeWork in 2017 to further expand its flexible business travel service offerings.

Looking ahead to 2019, the question for those in the corporate travel sector isn't if the use of sharing economy will continue to grow. All signs suggest it will, and business travelers will continue to use shared options whether they have formal company approval or not. Instead, the challenge will be if the growing acceptance of such services among travel brands and corporate travel managers keeps up with demand. Because the companies that do not include sharing options in their travel policies will only end up frustrating employees and hindering business progress.

2. SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZE COMPANIES GET A SEAT AT THE TABLE



Small and mid-size enterprises (SMEs) are prominent players in the American economy, with nearly half of the nation's workforce employed by companies with 100 or less employees. The overall contribution of these organization is growing as well. According to the October 2018 Small Business Optimism Index from the National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB), "small businesses continue to support the three percent-plus growth of the economy and add significant numbers of new workers to the employment pool."

In fact, in 2019, the economic clout of these SMEs will attract growing attention from the corporate travel sector, which will look to expand the services and products aimed at serving this traditionally overlooked sector.

SMEs have traditionally been at a disadvantage in negotiating corporate travel programs, mostly because they lacked the requisite travel volume to receive discounted rates from airlines and hotels. Yet another challenge is convincing these companies to consider managed solutions in the first place. But in 2019, the market seems primed to respond with products and services designed specifically with the SME segment in mind.

There's two key factors driving this renewed interest in SMEs in corporate travel. One reason is growing demand from SMEs themselves. As these SMEs increase travel spend in support of their growing ambitions, many are paying closer attention to how they manage travel activity, and minimizing expenses will become a strategic priority. Another is the continued growth of technology solutions like artificial intelligence and automation tools like chatbots, which allow corporate travel platform providers to deliver high-quality service at greater scale and lower cost.

One travel supplier that's paying more attention to SMEs is Hyatt Hotels Corp. Under its new Hyatt Leverage corporate travel program, small businesses can save up to 15 percent off the lowest available room rate when booking participating Hyatt properties. Hyatt Leverage also includes traveler tracking and spend management tools, which can help SMEs save money on their travel expenditures.

Another SME-targeted procurement solution is Best Western Hotels & Resorts' new BW Groups RFP Tool. Created in partnership with online hotel sales and booking provider HotelPlanner, the tool enables online requests for proposal management, email notifications, auto-response, and reporting and analytics tools to simplify the group booking process.

As noted by Business Travel News in May 2018, the growing prominence of small and mid-market companies is a beacon to travel suppliers "looking to build relationships with companies in this space as a way to support their own growth." Quoted in the story, Nathan Park, director of groups and meetings at Intercontinental Hotels Group, said that, "We are always looking at how we tap into the engine that is driving the economy and [how we] play a role."

For SMEs on the learning curve, or on the fence, about the decision to set up a partial or full-service managed travel solution, Park recommends taking a consultative approach. "[Mid-market firms] have all kinds of different needs," he said. "They want a true business partner, not just someone slinging RFPs across the country for them. They want someone to sit down and take the time to say, 'These are the industry trends, tools that are there, the plethora of options.' [They need someone to] key into their strategic objectives and...[understand] traveler satisfaction, brands they go to, experiences they are having."

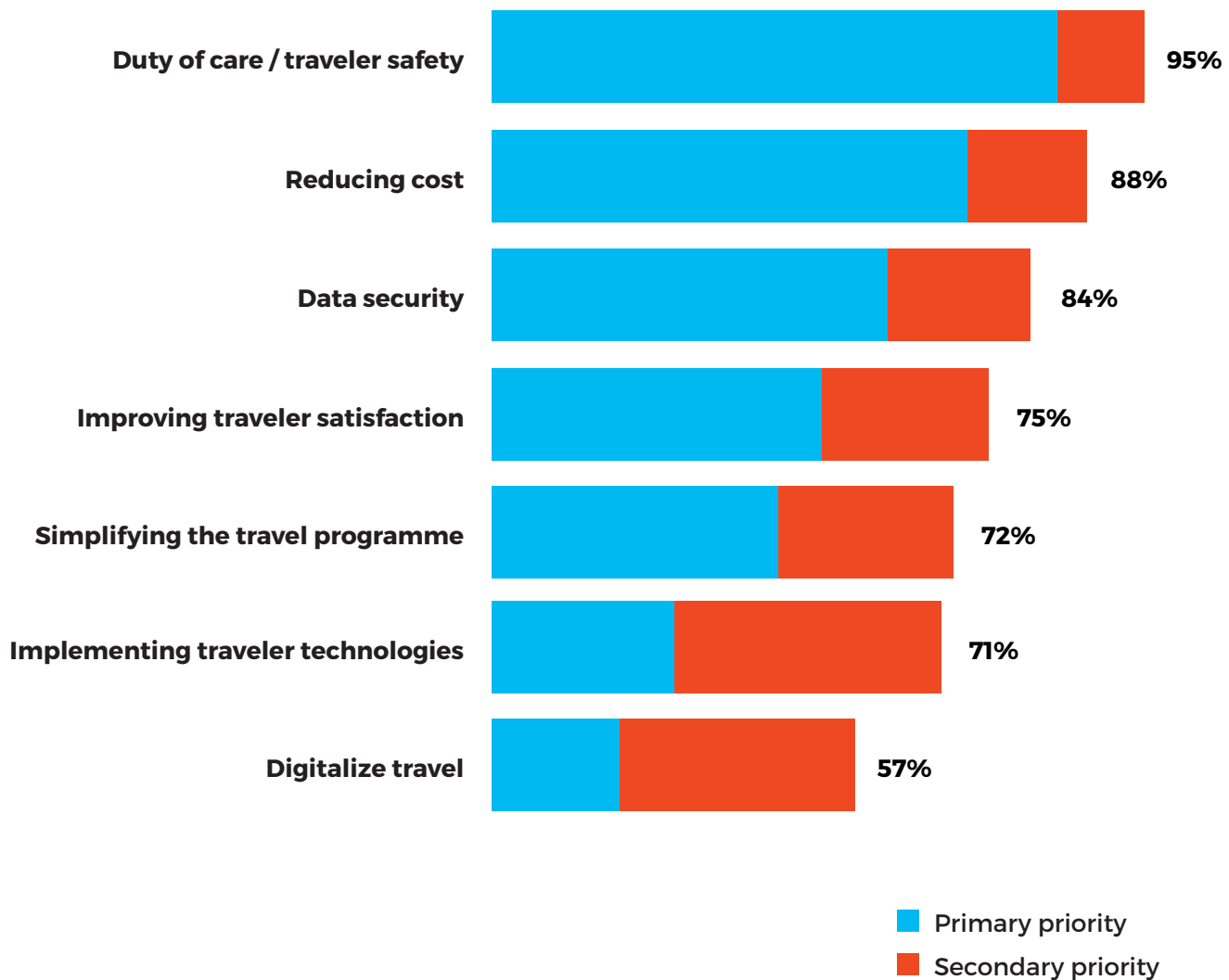
For SMEs seeking a balance between managed and unmanaged products, evolving technologies already in the market offer the desired level of freedom and flexibility. Examples include AI-powered recommendations to scale customer service, and incentives to encourage compliance while still enabling booking flexibility. For SME essentials like expense reporting and management, it's foreseeable that more solutions like these will be incorporated into SME-targeted travel services in the future.

3. BUSINESS TRAVELERS DEMAND AN END-TO-END EXPERIENCE



Simplification is an increasingly important goal for today's busy, overworked, and stressed-out, business travelers. According to a 2017 survey by Association of Corporate Travel Executives (ACTE), program simplification is a strategic priority for corporate travel managers heading into 2019. Benefits of simplification, states the ACTE report, include "improved traveler satisfaction, reduced cost, and time saved." In turn, "these efficiencies all enable greater productivity and certainty for the traveller, which are key objectives for business travel, leading 72 percent of travel buyers to indicate simplification will be a strategic priority for the year ahead."

Strategic Priorities for Corporate Travel Managers in the Year Ahead



Source: ACTE, "Simplifying Managed Travel," October 2017

This growing demand for simplification is leading to more requests for business travel tools that can link together the fragmented pieces of the corporate travel experience, including booking, trip management, customer service, and expensing, all in one convenient interface.

In a 2015 New York Times story on business travel technology, Norm Rose, president of Belmont, California-based Travel Tech Consulting, foresaw "a future in which interactive software will automatically be able to guide travelers through their journey, helping schedule and coordinate flights, hotels, and rental cars. The more intelligence there is, the more behind-the-scenes activity can happen if there is a disruption or a change in flight. This should make it easier for travelers. By 2020, we should begin to see the impact of this."

For some of the world's more cutting edge organizations, this technology prediction is now arriving ahead of schedule. TripActions is one such solution, offering a customized booking experience for business travelers which uses machine learning technology to reduce the time to book each trip from hours to a few minutes. TripActions' AI-driven platform also recognizes when a flight is delayed or cancelled and proactively offers up potential itinerary revisions. If the traveler requires further help, there's an option to bring in live human interaction, via TripActions' 24/7 team of agents. When alerted to an issue, they automatically contact a traveler via chat, SMS, or phone with solutions to keep their trip in motion with as little friction as possible.

This seamless ability to switch back and forth between tech and human channels with minimal effort may help to redefine the business travel experience moving forward. According to executives that oversee corporate travel policy, this more fluid vision for business travel can't come soon enough: travelers already deal with these problems every day.

"A business traveler may have a confirmed itinerary, but naturally things may change," said Omar Ghani, strategic sourcing manager for Lyft, a TripActions client, in 2018 conversation with Skift. "Let's just say that you decided to make a last-minute travel change and you have to cancel your trip, or there's a travel delay. But instead of having to go into a travel management platform to express your grievances, they recognize your grievance much more quickly using tech solutions and through their customer service. You get the feeling that your voice is being heard [as a business traveler], and I think that's very important. As business travel has moved into these very fast-moving industry environments in the last five years, where you have to make a very fast decision about corporate-related travel, that's key."

4. MIXING BUSINESS AND LEISURE IS HERE TO STAY

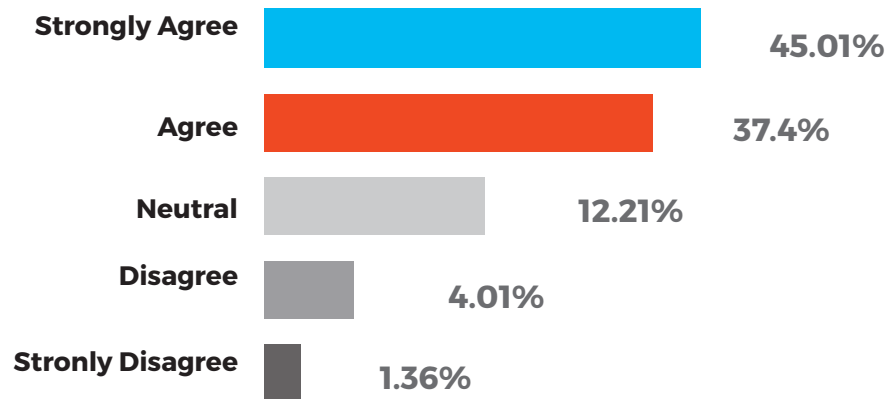


“Bleisure, really?” asked *The Economist* in 2015, calling the decade-old term describing when workers combine corporate travel with leisure trips “a terrible neologism.” But as awkward-sounding as it may be, the surging trend of travelers mixing business and leisure trips will continue to grow in 2019, impacting decisions on everything from corporate travel policy to expense management and business travel product development.

Leisure travel is increasingly seen as an inextricable component of the business travel experience. Just consider Hilton Hotels & Resorts’ March 2018 survey of 1,200 U.S. business travelers between the ages of 23 and 35, which found compelling evidence of the motivating power of trips in their overall career and employment decisions.

Thirty-nine percent of respondents stated that they would not join a company that did not offer travel as part of the job. Seventy-five percent of respondents see business travel as a major work perk; 65 percent consider it a status symbol; and 56 percent actually create reasons to travel for business. The 2018 TripActions Report found that 90 percent of respondents see traveling as a job perk, and 80 percent “feel more excited about their job after traveling.”

Do you agree or disagree with the following: “I view traveling as a perk of my job.”



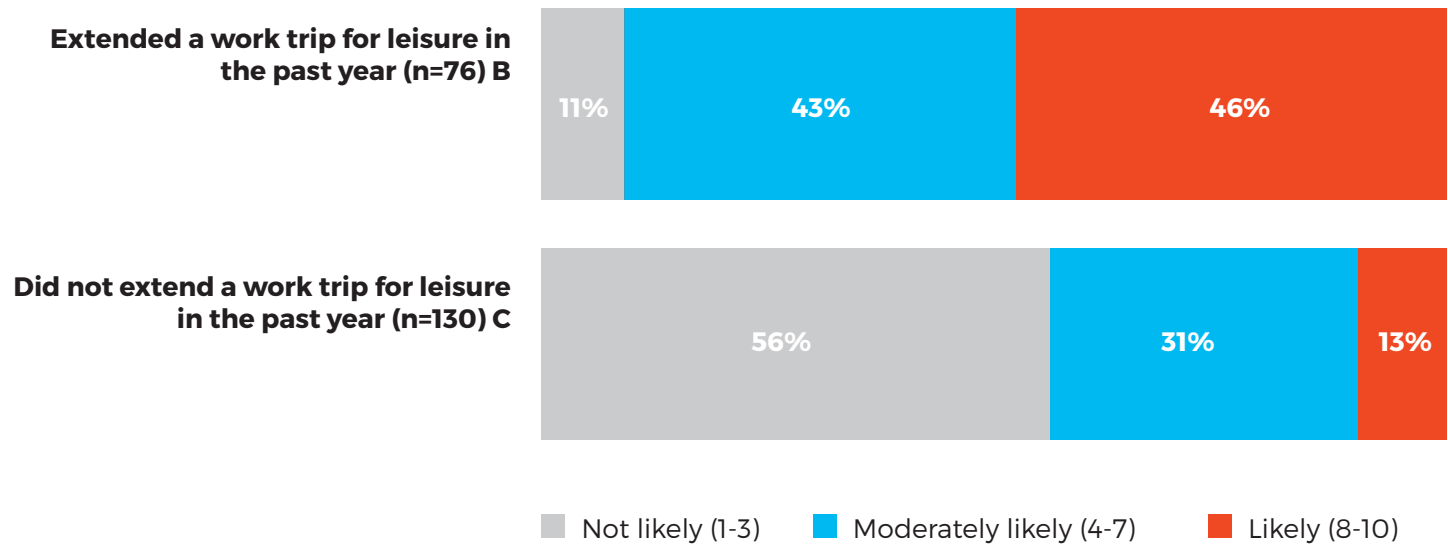
Source: TripActions “Business Travel Trends” Survey, 2018

These findings also align with a separate 2017 survey from Booking.com, in which 45 percent of respondents called the ability to book bleisure trips “a better work perk than traditional workplace benefits.”

Many in the corporate travel sector agree that business and leisure will continue to blur, impacting how they design products and services for corporate travelers. As Marvin Lee, account manager for marketing and alliances at Asiana Airlines told Travel Weekly in 2018, “the bleisure segment was an inevitable evolution in the travel industry that will only continue to get larger and larger. With the increasing globalization of business and technology, the once-discrete line between business and leisure travel will blur further. There is no longer a reason for the business traveler to have to sacrifice leisure in order to be successful in their profession.”

As the popularity of combined work and leisure trips grows, business booking platforms and corporate travel managers are adapting to allow for more simultaneous booking of business and leisure travel. Consider the results of “Extending Business Travel into Leisure Time – Bleisure Study,” a June 2018 report from the GBTA Foundation and Hilton with a focus on bleisure’s implications for managed travel programs. The study found that 46 percent of business travelers were likely to extend a work trip for leisure during the past year, while another 43 percent were moderately likely. Only 11 percent of business travelers said they were “not likely” to do so.

**How likely are business travelers to extend a work trip for leisure?
(Rated on a 10-point scale)**



Source: GBTA "Extending Business Travel into Leisure Time – Bleisure Study," June 2018

The GBTA believes this has important implications for company policy decisions and the tools they provide to employees. When thinking about how companies can improve the bleisure travel experience for employees, GBTA Foundation director of research Monica Sanchez suggested, "...establishing clear rules for reimbursing expenses incurred by non-employees, helping travelers understand the resources available to them on the leisure portion of their trip, and developing a policy regarding preferred suppliers and booking channels."

The GBTA-Hilton report also found that 12 percent of travelers needed assistance during their travel, while a different GBTA-AIG Travel report found that 83 percent women say that they have experienced one or more safety-related concerns or incidents while travelling for business in the past year. As the lines between business and leisure travel blur, corporate travel platform providers and employers must address the need for compliance and regulatory issues that arise with it.

Managing bleisure traveler needs is a long-tail problem with many unanswered questions, many of which are highlighted by the GBTA-Hilton study. How does a company estimate the additional costs? How does it enable platforms to make that distinction? What is the best way to manage duty of care?

While company policy makers and travel management platforms grapple with some of the aforementioned challenges, the fact that they are evaluating these needs and asking these questions is a step in the right direction. As business travelers become more insistent with their demands, 2019 is likely to be a year for further travel product integration that will allow for an easier booking experience all round.

5. CORPORATE TRAVEL EVOLVES TO BECOME PEOPLE-FIRST



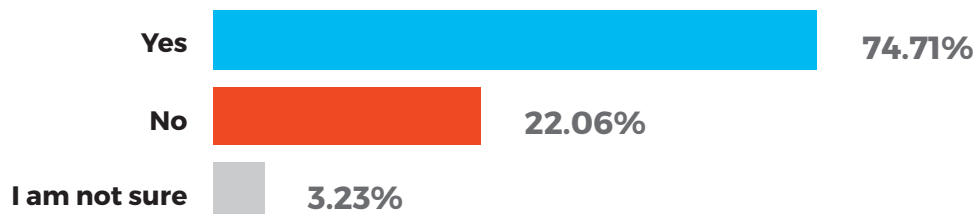
In 2019, the stresses of corporate travel will continue to add up: cancelled flights, changing plans, time away from home, and unhealthy habits all weigh upon business travelers. That's why organizations are increasingly recognizing a need to redesign travel policies to allow their employees to be happier, healthier, and more productive on the road. This also plays into the growing shift toward "consumerization," referencing the desire among business travelers to use the same tools they use to book personal trips, and an increasing desire among those in the corporate travel space to decrease friction between the different stages of the travel journey.

On one hand, it's still true that business travelers want to get out of office. Virtually all (92 percent) of the road warrior respondents in TripActions' 2018 business traveler survey said they want to travel for work, with answers evenly divided among "loving," "liking," or "not minding" business trips. And, as noted previously, most (90 percent) see traveling as a perk of their job, while 80 percent feel more excited about their job after traveling.

But that doesn't mean these trips are always enjoyable. Pain points include time away from family and home, sleep disruption, and poor diet and exercise. Data included a May 2018 feature from the Harvard Business Review, titled "Just How Bad is Business for Your Health?" found that frequent business travel (14 or more nights each month) heightened the risk of negative health consequences including anxiety, depression, obesity, and alcohol dependence.

Out-of-touch company travel tools and policies further compound the pain. TripActions found that 75 percent of business travelers are required to use company-provided booking tools or resources, such as a travel agent or travel manager.

Does the company require that you use the company booking tool, travel agent / manager?



Source: TripActions "Business Travel Trends" Survey, 2018

Yet, half of respondents said they still make trip purchases "out of policy." Lack of inventory was cited as the top reason, followed by time, with 83 percent of respondents reporting that they needed an hour or more to book a trip. The situation is no better while travelers are in-transit or in-destination. TripActions found that when faced with unexpected difficulties like flight delays and cancellations or overbooked hotels, 64 percent of business travelers reported they felt they were left to deal with those issues on their own. An employee that feels isolated, stressed, and distracted will not be at their best.

"To make the most of the opportunities business travel affords, travelers should arrive at their destinations feeling rested, focused, and ready to connect," stated TripActions CEO & Co-founder Ariel Cohen in the TripActions 2018 State of Business Travel Report. "But corporate business travel programs are largely outdated, frustrating employers and employees alike."

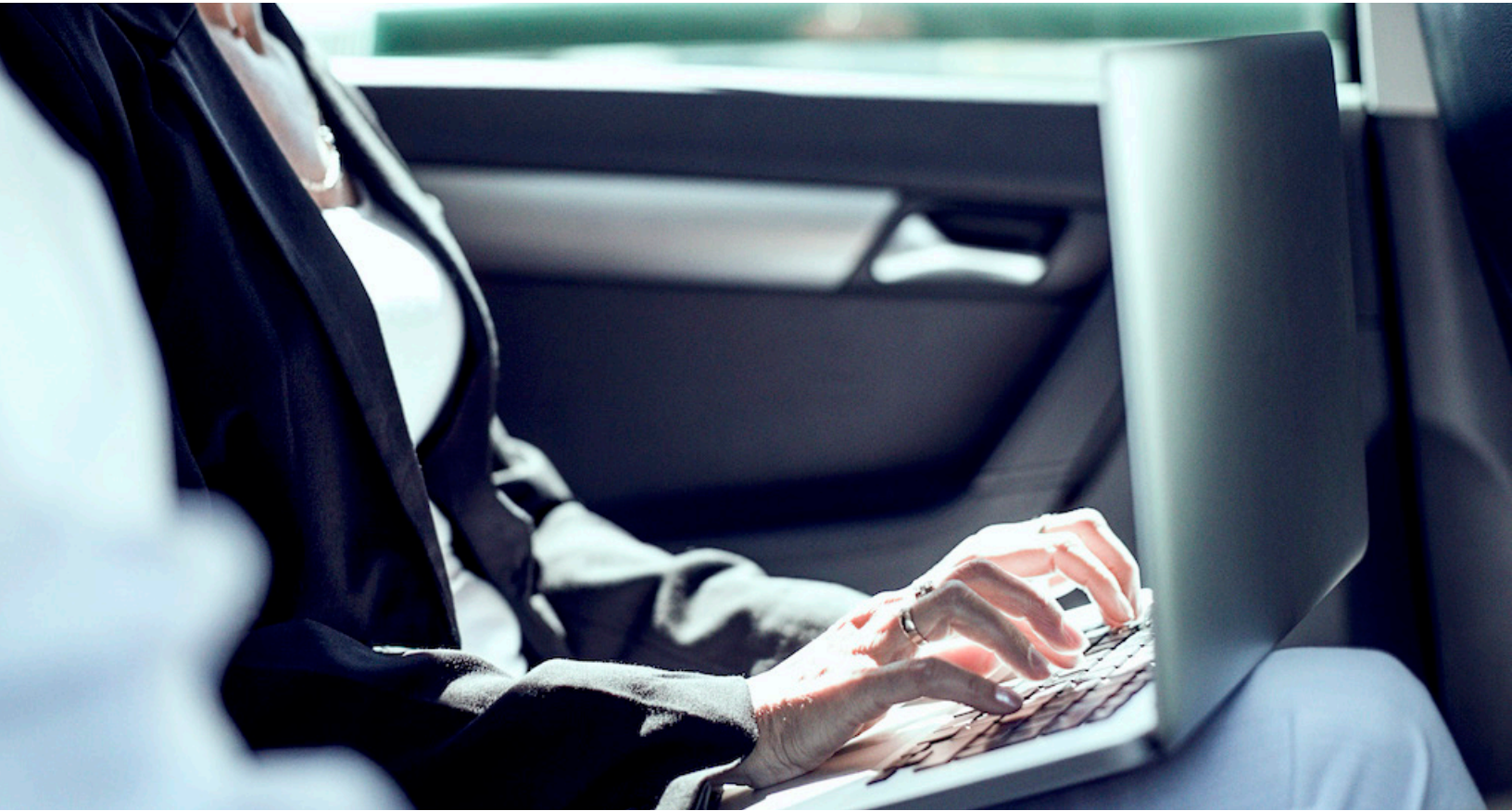
How will organizations address these traveler woes? The answer will be to put a greater focus on people before policy.

On the health front, Andrew Rundle, an associate professor at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health who authored the Harvard Business Review study of travel-related health issues, sees the solution as a mix of individual employee responsibility and company-wide "support in the form of education, training, and a corporate culture that emphasizes healthy business travel."

Re-shaping travel tools and policies to better balance cost and compliance controls with employee flexibility and freedom can also help reduce the friction of business travel. Take TripActions' booking tool, for example. By providing access to a vast inventory of flights, hotels, rental car, and rail options, coupled with machine learning capabilities that prioritize user preferences first, user research and booking time drops from that hour-plus to an average of six minutes. TripActions also incentivizes employees to book within policy with Amazon gift cards, upgrades for future business trips, personal getaways, and other rewards. This makes travelers happy, and companies save an average of 34 percent on hotel spend.

Whatever the solution that they choose, the companies that recognize and adapt to their business traveler needs stand to benefit from happier, more productive employees, simultaneously saving money and gaining better transparency and control over travel spend in the process.

6. CORPORATE TRAVEL GETS SMARTER ABOUT BLENDING TECHNOLOGY WITH THE HUMAN TOUCH OF CUSTOMER SERVICE



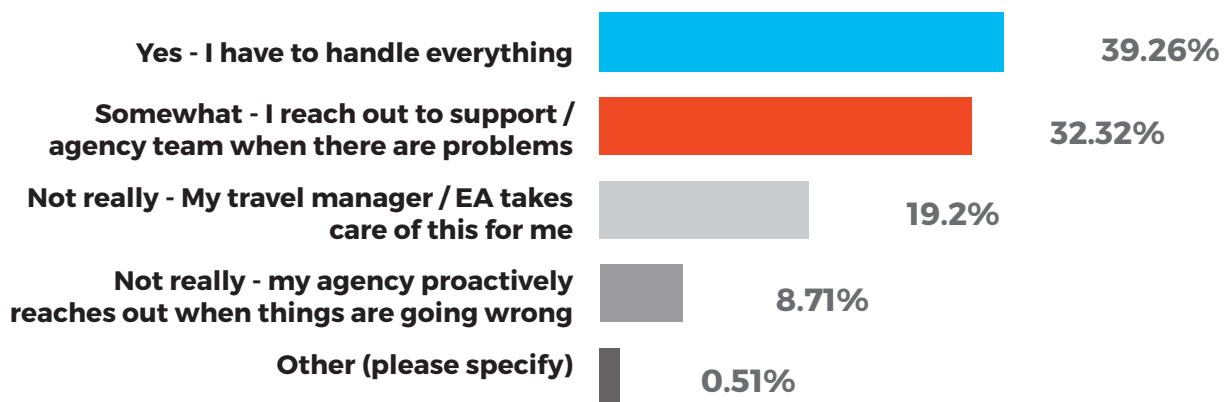
For those designing corporate travel products for business travel, it's attractive to pursue technology as an "end-all" solution to user needs. And at least among younger travelers raised on technology, the mobile phone is often seen as their ticket to ride, able to fulfill nearly every aspect of their trip via self service. But as more organizations now realize, delivering technology to solve business travel problems cannot be done to the exclusion of the human touch.

In 2019 technology-focused business travel tools will need to be properly balanced with human-focused service, contextually delivered based on the traveler's constantly-evolving needs. Smart organizations that serve corporate travelers will get smarter about knowing when it's OK to provide automation and when to provide help from a real-live human being.

The demand for a “return to humanity” has actually been a growing theme among business travelers, who are increasingly tired of robotic customer service operators and automated flight cancellation emails. As Skift discovered in its 2016 study of “Supertravelers,” a tech-savvy group known as the “...early-adopter, avid, and demanding travelers” who are likeliest to be most engaged with the latest technologies, many actually just want help from a human being when an issue comes up.

Indeed, this lack of in-the-moment support is consistently mentioned as a key pain point among business travelers. The TripActions 2018 State of Business Travel Report found that more than 70 percent of travelers felt like they had to fend for themselves when something went wrong.

Do you feel like you have to fend for yourself when things go wrong on a business trip?



Source: TripActions “Business Travel Trends” Survey, 2018

No traveler wants to be in that situation. When problems arise, or even proactively before travelers even see these problems, they want immediate access to help and speedy resolutions. And even though automated tech can often address common issues, many travel problems are simply too intricate or unique for automated solutions, meaning intervention from an actual person could make the traveler experience infinitely better.

Interviews with heavy business travelers confirm the demand for business travel solutions that better balance tech with the human touch. “Technology can be very efficient, but not always,” said Chris Heywood, SVP of global communications for NYC & Company. “There has to be a balance, especially in hotels and hospitality. They are not interchangeable and automation cannot overtake the personal touch.”

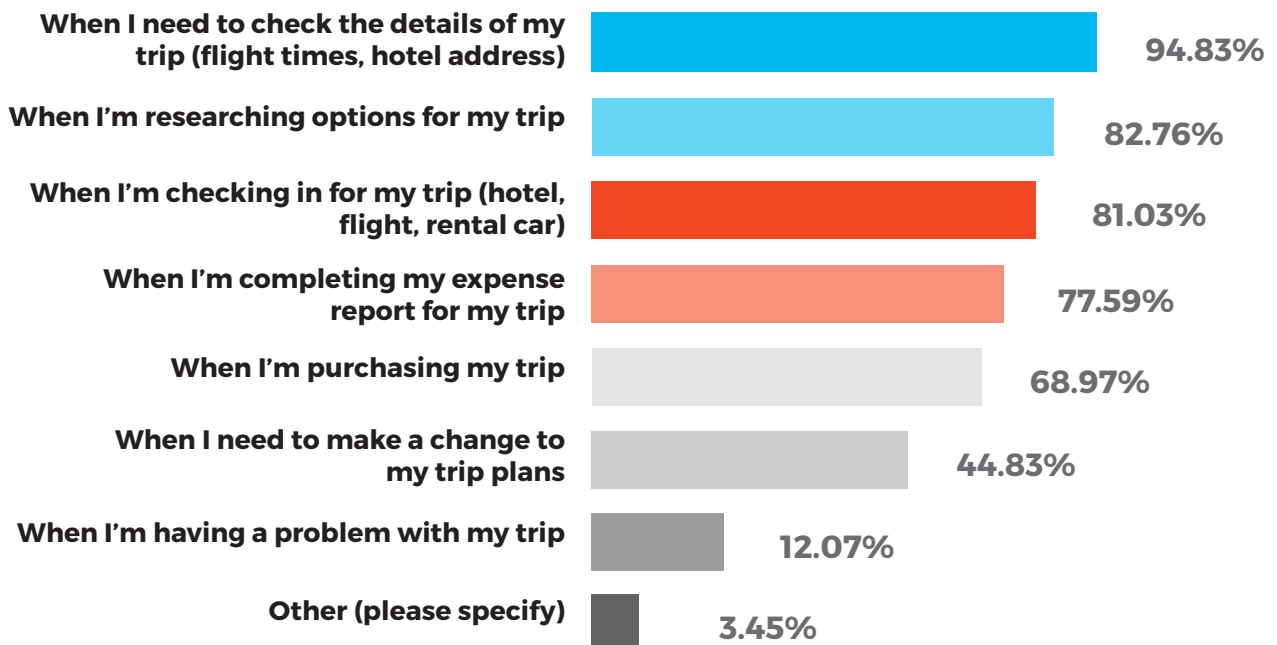
Kelly Saling, Visit Seattle’s vice president of sales and services, relies “too much” on tools and automation. “I recently had a hotel booking go wrong that would not have been corrected without several rounds of human contact,” she said. “That was more of a monetary than a time consequence. Airline bookings are harder to fix.”

That's not to say humans are infallible. Only eight percent of the 2,900 business travelers surveyed by TripActions said that their travel agent proactively reached out out when plans unexpectedly changed.

When is automation appropriate then? Skift's 2018 Global Business Travel Report clearly shows that most travelers are comfortable with automation for simple tasks like checking flight details and hotel addresses (95 percent), researching trip options (83 percent), and checking for flights, rooms, and cars (81 percent). The more involved the task, such as changing plans, the more respondents said they wanted human help. When there's a problem, few (12 percent) are in the same comfort zone with tech as they are with a person.

**In which of the following situations would you be comfortable using an automated service?
(Select all that apply)**

Respondent base: Business Travelers



Source: Skift's "2018 Global Business Travel Report"

Today, more travel suppliers are responding to this feedback. Kimpton Hotels + Restaurants has recognized this need with its overarching Stay Human brand campaign. On a recent No Vacancy hotel industry podcast, Kathleen Reidenbach, Kimpton's chief commercial officer, spoke of "an increasingly harsh world, where people are feeling more disconnected than ever before, despite having so much technology." Innovative concepts under the Stay Human campaign include "Room 301," a social experiment in which successive guests staying in the same room are prompted to contribute to in-room activities for the next guest to discover.

Artificial intelligence and machine learning can also help organizations get smarter about knowing when and why to provide assistance, and will help businesses achieve these priorities by being better able to predict what travelers need. TripActions' own product also incorporates machine learning to identify potentially problematic patterns in customer itineraries. For instance, algorithms can look at the historic on-time performance of a particular flight, and if they determine a potential or likely delay, proactively message the traveler, alerting them to the possible issue and offering them a substitute flight to prevent any unexpected problems.

"Knowing what they want and how they want it will not only simplify the booking experience, but enhance the traveler's engagement and satisfaction," said Gabe Rizzi, chief sales officer and president of Travel Leaders Corporate, in an interview with Skift.

7. THE STAYING POWER OF FACE-TO-FACE MEETINGS



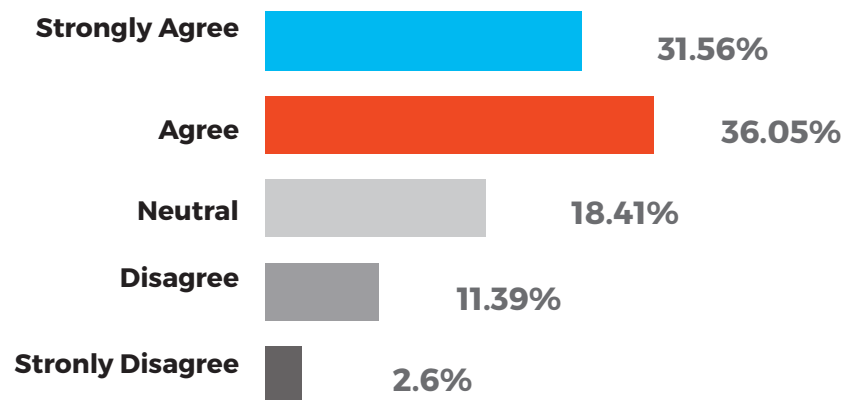
In-person meetings have long been a critical component of business travel. But in 2019, face-to-face will take on an even greater priority for organizations of all shapes and sizes. In spite of the continued evolution of digital tools like video chats that allow virtual communication, a growing collection of employees from across various industries are recognizing the continued importance of face-to-face contact.

Just ask Michael Massari, Las Vegas-based chief sales officer for Caesars Entertainment. In a recent interview with “Chief Executive” magazine, Massari, whose team books more than 16,000 meetings and events annually at Caesars’ 40-plus North American properties, shared this favorite Roman saying: “Nothing good ever happened until first there was a meeting.” And this maxim: “If it’s not that important, send an email. If it’s important but not mission-critical, pick up the phone. But if it’s mission-critical, go see somebody.”

The importance of face-to-face business meetings is corroborated by research. Virtually all respondents to TripActions’ 2018 business traveler survey embrace the power of face-to-face meetings, with 90 percent believing that business travel is important in driving company growth.

Conversely, nearly three-quarters (67 percent) of the TripActions respondents find it more difficult to build business relationships over video. For one thing, there's the disconnect caused by technology that works slowly, intermittently, or not at all. These distractions can be ignored during regular syncs or chats about routine tasks, but when it comes to more high-stakes meetings and conversations, those same technical difficulties can negatively impact business.

"It is difficult to build a business relationship over video conference."



Source: TripActions "Business Travel Trends" Survey, 2018

One organization helping encourage more face-to-face meetings is the U.S. Travel Association (USTA), which continues to take the lead in promoting the power of face-to-face engagement through its "Meetings Means Business Coalition" initiative. "Whether you are a Millennial or a Boomer, if you are not meeting face-to-face or going to a convention to find out what's going on, you are missing out," said USTA President and CEO Roger Dow.

In a video for USTA's CEO-driven business leadership series, Deloitte CEO Cathy Engelbert describes the firm's hallways and conferences as the places where "five generations of professionals come together to network and learn together." Deloitte's "next-generation workplace" is purpose-designed to help their people "build their capabilities, develop new skills and collaborate on innovative new solutions for our clients."

The TripActions report also found that 91 percent of those surveyed would be ready to board a plane to go personally establish, grow, or maintain a business relationship, or close a deal. With employees eager to travel for work for the advancement of business goals, it's crucial for employers to take into account their needs while on the road.

8. THE RISE OF “INNOVATIONAL” TRAVEL IN THE MEETINGS SECTOR



The traditional rationale for business travel is productivity. And in the coming year, closing deals and boosting productivity will remain a key focus for many work-focused trips. But they're no longer the only reason organizations will invest more on corporate travel. In fact, thanks to a growing focus on overall employee wellbeing, and the mixing of leisure and work trips, more companies are looking for new ways to not only boost employee productivity, but to use business trips to help inspire their employees' creativity and help them come up with the next big innovative idea.

Employee wellbeing is more critical than companies may realize. Organizations that put policy ahead of people may be hurting their employees, and the business itself. While unintentional, the harm can measurably impact employee satisfaction. Nearly one-third (28 percent) of companies surveyed by TripActions identified corporate travel policies as a “significant” or “growing” factor in retention. Worker frustration in turn can dampen morale, performance and productivity.

It's not just the employees and corporate travel managers who are starting to think about business travel as a key motivational tool. It's also an approach backed up by growing academic evidence. Janet Sperstad, who spent two decades as a meeting planner before becoming director of the pioneering event management program at Madison College in Madison, Wisconsin, is a foremost authority on the convergence of neuroscience and meeting design.

As she sees it, participating in work trips and meetings away from home can help encourage employees to consider new ideas and perspectives. "Innovation happens when we get involved with new ideas and change our lens and perspective on the world," she said. "It's about eliciting the senses and igniting the emotions--and nothing serves that end like the power of travel. When you allow people to go off and experience a destination, to leave home, to go where the locals go, and to depart from the norm, their eyes open in profound new ways. This is where creativity and innovation come to life, in a deeply personal way--our senses are the only thing that helps us understand if something is real or not."

Recognition of this insight is now also working its way into the event programming and design at various business travel conferences. From re-imagined program design to dynamic new forums for interaction, collaboration, and engagement, the business and meetings market is positively effervescent with new ways to heighten the senses. This "innovational travel" in turn is heightening expectations and demand for experiences, ideas, and knowledge. The "festivalization" of meetings is one prime example, as events like SXSW, TED, and C2 Montreal expand exponentially in scope, attendance, and impact year after year.

The opportunity to utilize creativity and innovation is also influencing growing demand for new types of meeting spaces for corporate travelers and meeting planners. Market leaders like MGM Resorts International, for example, are intentionally creating or reimagining spaces to reflect the new reality. Forefront examples include the new high-tech Cypress Executive Lounge at ARIA Las Vegas. Purpose-built for corporate boards and high-level strategy meetings, the private, self-enclosed venue includes a 30-person conference room with movable furniture; three private suites; and library-style study.

Another example is MGM's transformation of the Monte Carlo resort into the sleek new Park MGM. Reinvented from within, the property's high-tech, high-touch group spaces include the Madison Meeting Center, the first executive meeting venue in Vegas, and The Ideation Studio, a unique hub for brainstorming, strategizing, and planning. Behavioral science dictated the design of each venue's high-tech, high-touch rooms.

"We believe that bringing this science into play is important in the meetings industry" said MGM's chief sales officer Michael Dominguez, during an exclusive showcase of the spaces at IMEX America 2018. "Everything you see in these projects reflects thinking about how we interact as human beings, including the physical environment, the lighting, and special technologies and products."

9. CORPORATE TRAVEL MOVES FROM POINTS TO PERSONALIZATION



In the past, the primary driver of loyalty in the business travel sector was points earned for flights, hotel stays, or car rentals. While earning those points, and the perks and rewards that come with them, is still important, the key focus of loyalty in 2019 has shifted. Instead of only being about earning points, today's business travelers are increasingly looking for loyalty experiences that make their trips more convenient and tailored to fit their preferences.

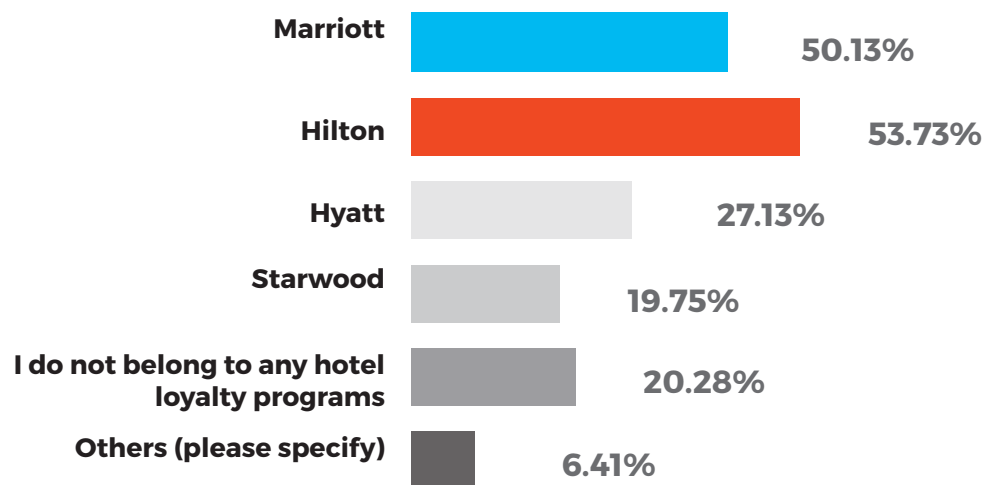
This shift towards seamless, personalized experience as a key driver of loyalty shows up in consumer research. The 2017 ACSI (American Consumer Satisfaction Index) Travel Report, which measures customer satisfaction benchmarks for major commercial airlines, hotel chains, and online travel agencies, found that "business traveler loyalty improves tremendously if complaints are handled perfectly." It's just one example of how traveler definitions and measures of loyalty are changing, and how brands and travel organizations in turn must understand and adapt to these evolving expectations and standards.

The travel preferences of Millennials like Ari Winkleman are one example of the changing habits driving this shift. Winkleman, 29, is founder and CEO of NYC-based Involvio, the global leader in student experience software for higher education. To grow the business, he travels more than half the year, either by car, train, or by air. On a recent 15-day hop that took him from NYC to two cities in India and then two more U.S. stops before returning home, he used six different airlines to complete nine individual flight legs.

And he is not loyal to any of those airlines. “I choose carriers strictly based on price, routes, and times that best fit my intentionally spontaneous and often volatile schedule,” said Winkleman. “I am on various airline rewards programs, and I build points on my American Express Business Platinum card, which affords me access to airport lounges around the world and other perks. But, my foremost drivers are flexibility and efficiency.”

Winkleman’s approach is emblematic of his generation. The TripActions 2018 State of Business Travel Report found that 21 percent of business travelers don’t belong to any hotel loyalty program, and are less interested in loyalty programs in general.

Do you belong to any hotel loyalty programs? If so, which ones?
(Select all that apply)



Source: TripActions “Business Travel Trends” Survey, 2018

Like Winkleman, who uses Uber “everywhere I go,” Millennials also far prefer shared car services over taxis and shuttles for ground transportation. In that context, traveler loyalty to ridesharing is once again driven by ease of use, convenience, and independence.

Traditional programs still offer binding ties though. Published in October 2018, research from the GBTA in partnership with Omni Hotels & Resorts finds that “business travelers consider three hotels before booking, and 82 percent say loyalty programs matter when making that decision.” Nearly all (90 percent) are motivated by rewards points and perks when selecting a hotel, and 81 percent “believe being a loyalty member results in better service.”

For companies with road warriors that hungrily chase airlines miles and points—and rack up big bills in the process, gaming-style software solutions can incentivize better business travel and spending decisions. The TripActions platform, for example, offers access to exclusive deals and rewards for employees who book cost-effective hotel rooms.

It is, however, personalization that is the true differentiator for business travelers. “From booking to check-out, our research confirms personalization is highly valuable to business travelers, with many seeking customized hotel experiences that are tailored to fit their business travel needs,” said Jessica Collison, GBTA director of research. “Both travel buyers and suppliers should evaluate how personalization factors into hotel booking and the guest experience when it comes to building their travel and loyalty programs.”

10. CFOs PLAY A GREATER ROLE IN BUSINESS TRAVELER HAPPINESS



Once relegated to roles that focused on budgeting and financial controls, the role of the chief financial officer (CFO) is now expanding to other areas of the enterprise. While maintaining a vigilant eye on budgets and the bottom line, this now includes broader investment in the employee travel experience. In fact, being an “experiential company” can produce the kind of ROI that CFOs dream about.

Data cited in a March 2017 Harvard Business Review article shows that companies that put their people first are 4.2 times more profitable than companies that don't. Organizations “that invest most heavily in employees' work environments also have 1.5 times more employee growth, pay their employees 1.5 times more, have twice the annual revenue, and four times the profit per employee.

One example of an organization that has empowered its CFO to take greater responsibility for employee travel decisions and wellbeing is Development Counsellors International (DCI), an organization that specializes in all phases of economic development and travel marketing. The CFO, Carrie Nepo, looks beyond just the financials and provides advice to improve employees' work-life balance. "As a company, we embrace a set of five values that are specific to our position as the leader in marketing places," said Nepo. "These values include the pursuit of happiness, a passionate embrace of places, and a thirst for knowledge."

Nepo was instrumental in defining these values, and she created and implemented supporting travel tools and policies. "These tools are intentionally designed to reduce stress and optimize productivity," says Nepo. "It's an investment in helping our employees best support our clients, while ensuring their own wellbeing and happiness."

Another example of the type corporate tools now being advocated by CFOs are Divvy and Expensify, two forward-thinking platforms for employee expense reporting. "After days, even weeks on the road, the last thing employees want to do is go through the arduous, boring task of sorting through receipts," said Nepo. "With Expensify, linked to our corporate Amex card, they simply snap a picture of the receipt and submit it immediately."

Other emerging technologies and tools targeting a more efficient and productive processes include corporate card company Brex, a corporate Uber account, access to video conference calling via UberConference, virtual access to HR benefits and Wage Works for commuter benefits via TriNet, and timekeeping app Function Fox.

"Figuring out which technologies and apps to use is an evolving process," Nepo said. The bottom line benefits include recruiting and retention. "Providing these empowering tools and policies has proven effective in attracting and retaining talent—and keeping them happy, motivated and productive," said Nepo.

Given DCI's business focus on marketing the travel and tourism sector, it serves the collective business interest for employees to travel gainfully on and off company time. Leisure or bleisure travel therefore becomes an investment back into the business.

According to a McKinsey Special Collection Report, four in ten CFOs spent most of their time on strategy, transformations, or other non-finance areas. Managing employee performance is rising on their list of priorities because of its effect on the bottom line. The impact of ease of business travel is undeniable on employee happiness, which in turns directly affects profitability, growth, and other revenue generating aspects of the company. As a result, the CFOs increasing involvement in this aspect of the company can only be expected to grow in 2019.

CONCLUSION



No matter the industry or organization size, business travel has never been a more valuable, or important, function to ensure company success. And while much of the perceived value of business travel has traditionally been derived from the function's monetary rewards (signing deals, winning new contracts), today there is growing recognition that the decisions made about business travel extend well beyond the bottom line.

In fact, organizations of all shapes and sizes are coming to an important realization. The decisions they make about corporate travel have significant impact on an organization's overall success and growth, influencing employee recruitment and retention efforts, worker productivity and morale, and overall efforts to control company costs. In this light, designing the right business travel program has an outside impact, easily helping to make or break a company's success just as much as any business deal.

It was with these high stakes in mind that Skift and TripActions created "10 Business Travel Trends for 2019," providing a roadmap to the most important topics, companies, tools, and strategies that will shape business travel in the year to come.

This year's trends cover a wide range of topics, including the sharing economy, the evolution of loyalty programs, the merits of balancing between human- and tech-driven travel support, the growing influence of small and mid-size businesses on the creation of new business travel tools, and much more.

But no matter the trend topic, one universal theme comes through loud and clear: it is people, not policies, that will drive the future of business travel innovation. By designing smarter travel programs, policies, and tools with employee wellbeing, preferences, and convenience at the center, organizations can ensure business travel continues to serve as a key driver of company success, both in 2019 and for the foreseeable future.

FURTHER READING

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"Just How Bad is Business for Your Health?" Harvard Business Review, May 2018

"The Supertraveler Manifesto: What Supertravelers Want From the Travel Industry," Skift, May 2016

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ABOUT TRIP ACTIONS

TripActions is the corporate travel management company shaping the future of business travel. Nothing can truly replicate the value of meeting face-to-face — which is why we're on a mission to power the in-person connections that move people, ideas and businesses forward.



Companies deserve a travel solution that takes the pain out of work trips so that their travelers can focus on being there, not getting there. With a vast selection of inventory, a personalized, intuitive user interface, and 24/7 proactive customer support, we make booking travel fast and easy. Companies enjoy complete travel program visibility and seamless integrations with their HR and expense systems.

To support our customers no matter where they are in the world, we have physical footprints in Palo Alto, San Francisco, Dallas, New York City, Sydney, Amsterdam and London.

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With 97% satisfaction, travelers prefer us.

Learn more about why innovative companies like Dropbox, Lyft, Sara Lee Frozen Bakery, Robinhood and the ACLU trust TripActions for their business travel at www.tripactions.com

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