DIGITAL REVOLUTION TO CHANGE BUSINESS TOURISM MASSIVELY

The ongoing digital revolution is not only changing the business tourism segment – it is already profoundly intervening in all processes. This is the key outcome of the GBTA Conference 2017, the largest business travel conference in Europe.

According to the second cross-cutting statement, travel managers are well advised to strategically redefine their role.

"Robots are the next level of automation," said Yvonne Moya, associate of bot supplier Festive Road. **Several sessions showed where Chatbots and artificial intelligence are already in use and which possibilities are about to become ready for the market.**

Other experts consider robotics to be "mainstream". They use artificial intelligence-based robotic processes to examine travelers' behavior in the business and to encourage them to comply with travel policies. For example, the intelligent software automatically encourages travelers to book early and thus cheaper fares.

Serdar Gürbüz, head of digital innovation at Turkish Airlines, uses chatbots for online check-in, among other things. Festive Road's Yvonne Moya allows travelers from any country to check their travel policies within seconds. "The topic is here and will stay here," she said. "It's about transferring it into the corporate environment."

Michel Rouse, Chief Technology Officer EMEA of FCM Travel Solutions, cited a striking example of digital assistants, which do not spend any departure times, but just gently warn at the right time when one must leave for the airport. It makes tons of data and intelligence to make it so simple, he said. Both resources, however, are now apparently sufficiently available.

This also applies to Meetings & Events. Jessie States, manager of professional development for Meeting Professionals International, drew a near future in which personal digitally-taped assistants will translate everything heard from any language into their own in real-time.

In conjunction with digital glasses they can identify and name any oncoming conference guest. "Imagine what that means for the efficiency of a meeting and business tourism segment," she said, not without addressing the obvious data protection issues.

The boom in wearables also brings a completely different problem. In 2020, every human being will carry on average five networked small computers. "How does a future W-Lan have to look like to handle that amount? Alas, it cannot work," she added.

All speakers made an effort to scare travel managers present that robots could take their jobs away. "It's about giving up mundane, repetitive work to the machines," says Karen Hutchings. This gives buyers and travel managers room for strategic tasks.

The fact that the role of travel management has to change was demonstrated by the first session of the conference. So far, travel buying has been the name of the game, said Jacqueline Taylor, vice

president of source-to-pay at Genpact. "We need to get away from it." The Post-Procurement Practitioner panel agreed that travel management should focus more on travelers and on added value rather than just cost-cutting.

"It's not about buying a product, it' about finding a solution," said VDR President Dirk Gerdom. **Instead of simple hotel bookings, service providers would have to offer total solutions from purchasing, payment and reimbursement.** Instead of simple car rental bookings an integrated mobility concept for corporate and rental cars. It's about "demand management," Taylor summed it up.

Travel management also has to change as the world of work changes. In the so-called gig economy with short work assignments, where a growing proportion of workforce is working for free, other rules apply to business travel, according to Peggy Smith, President and CEO of Worldwide ERC. Dealing with mobility is becoming a factor in employee retention for young people.

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