Event Report: Future Travel Experience Global 2021

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1. Introduction

"Future Travel Experience Global 2021" was held in Las Vegas, Nevada for 3 days- from December 7th to 9th, 2021. The Conference was sponsored by Future Travel Experience, which introduces cutting-edge travel technology and the latest industry trends, mainly online, and holds annual regional and thematic events, such as Europe and Asia. Of those, Global is the largest and is held in North America. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the event was held virtually last year. However, for the first time in two years, this year's event was held face-to-face and had over 770 participants, including airlines, airport operators, service providers, government officials, and experts from around the world, not to mention the United States.

The event was organized into two parts consisting of lecture sessions and panel discussions on various themes in the conference hall, as well as exhibit booths from aviation and tourism related companies and organizations introducing company products and services in the event hall. This year, in addition to "Future Airports," the general session that focused on prospective airport services, other sessions discussed the latest in services and technology, analyzed trends, and forecasted the future of travel in a post-coronavirus world, and so on. Sessions included "Digital and Innovation," which introduced new business models utilizing next-generation digital platforms, "Air Mobility X," which considered the emerging fields of eVTOLs and electronic aircraft, and four "Ancillary" sessions focused on improving passenger experience and revenue opportunities. This report will provide excerpts

from the program that may be particularly useful, concentrating on the sessions.

2. Tours and Briefing of the TSA Advancing the Checkpoint Environment (ACE) Initiative at McCarran International Airport (LAS)

On the first day of the event, an introductory tour of checkpoint technology was provided by the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) at McCarran Airport. Hosted by the TSA Innovation Task Force, the tour focused on the introduction of state-of-the-art technology and new security inspection equipment at security checkpoints.

LAS used the pandemic period to refurbish its facilities, building a TSA ACE proof-of-concept site equipped with four security lanes (each with a CT scanner from a different vendor and an automated screening lane (ASL)) and a variety of the latest technology from June of this year. The TSA Task Force uses this site to compare and evaluate these cutting-edge technologies from multiple vendors in a live checkpoint environment.

Notable technologies introduced included state-of-the-art X-ray inspection equipment (equipped with ASL), UV-C light disinfection systems, enhanced AIT body scanners, PFM (customer movement analysis), and credential authentication technology (CAT). Among these was IDEMIA's "E-Gate" (which is awaiting final TSA approval). Equipped with CAT, it can be used to access passports, IDs (driver's licenses), QR code data (off mainly smartphone screens), and take camera images to authenticate passengers (being photographed is optional), and which specifications supposedly allow for a near perfect identity verification of 99.8% (incidentally, the facial match rate

while wearing a mask is about 70%, so there is "room for technological innovation" in the future).

In addition, it seems that the collaboration between LAS airport and TSA is excellent, with both managers confirming this when they said that "today's introduction of new technology at LAS would not have been possible without the close cooperation between the airport and TSA." Furthermore, for future airports across the U.S. they advised that "if related organizations can build strong partnerships, it will greatly contribute to streamlining operations, optimizing identity verification, and improving customer service for passengers."

3. Baggage Innovation Working Group

Following the TSA tour, I participated in the Baggage Innovation WG held at McCarran Airport. Responsible parties in charge of what is called the Baggage Handling System (BHS), including many manufacturers and others, attended this meeting and discussed such issues as the sharing of current burdens and what future BHS-related facilities should be.

During the WG, much time was spent on an overview of the BHS facilities and examples of "RFID tags" at LAS, where it, along with at Hong Kong Airport, was first introduced globally. In the past, BHS systems used barcode readers, but as there are many benefits in adopting RFID tags, such as improvement in the read rate of checked baggage, reduction in maintenance costs, and a boost in baggage tracking functions, the TSA too highly evaluated its usefulness.

BAGSID, which leads in the BHS-related industry of barcode reader technology, also participated in the WG, and there was a lively question-and-answer session on the recognition rate of RFID tags, installation costs, and differences in barcode formats.

4. Keynote Speeches

Taking the podium for the keynote speech was Mr. Daiel Coleman, the founder of Future Travel Experience. He spoke on the value of having this event in-person for the first time in two years since the coronavirus pandemic, and emphasized the necessity for the aviation industry to not only recover but also make significant progress in a post-coronavirus era. He also stated that LAS has more direct flights than in 2019, and that leisure demand in the U.S. has rebounded substantially. Furthermore, while using biometric authentication to technologically modernize checkpoints had been attracting attention since before COVID, LAS was quick to adopt this innovation, and was introduced as the only U.S. airport where 100% of international passengers are processed by biometric technology. With the coronavirus growing demand for touchless devices, he predicted that airports around the world will accelerate the introduction of the latest technologies, including biometric authentication.

Next, three individuals from the Virgin Group (Virgin Atlantic's Commercial Strategy Development Director, Virgin Voyages' Vice President of e-Commerce, and Virgin Hyperloop's Senior Director of Global Business Development) took the stage. Focusing on the latest news from the Hyperloop enterprise, which successfully conducted the world's first passenger boarding demonstration experiement last November, there was a business introduction on the themes of "Sutainability," "Technology," "Customer Experience," and "Royalty" that the Group is working on. In particular, with regard to the Hyperloop system, they emphasized that they'd like to grow the company's main business in the future by reducing environmental impact with 100% electric power, and to be able to commercialize it in the next few years, not decades.

Finally, United Airline's Vice President of Corporate Development took the podium and spoke on the three points of "Sustainability" (mainly SAF, decarbonization), "Aerospace" (eVTOL, eSTOL, H2, Supersonic), and "Technology" (AI, Robots, Automation). In particular, while introducing an example of a future NY-London business day trip pairing Supersonic and eVTOL aircraft, he gave a powerful lecture on how the company will transform the aviation industry and points worth paying attention to in the future of their business.

5. Future Aiport Session（What Should a Post-Coronavirus Airport Look Like?）

Moderated by Antoine Rostworowski, Senior Vice President of ACI World, and joined onstage by representatives from American Airlines, Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport, Oman Airports Management Company, and Collins Aerospace, the session held a discussion on the theme of how airports should look and be managed in order to prosper in a post-coronavirus world.

Representatives of airlines and airport companies stated that, as may be expected, COVID-19 was a turning point for improving customer experiences and accelerating biometric authentication, especially touchless, that there is growing need to proactively provide information to customers, and a key to be chosen by them would be to digitize all services at airports.

On the other hand, the representative from Collins, the lone vendor participating, relayed when asked to give his frank opinion that "Airports and airlines are demanding biometric authentication, but for providers, it is very difficult to connect various information and institutions, obtain approval, and integrate them." In this case, there was agreement from the airport side, with representatives saying that "While the pandemic has certainly accelerated technological innovation, there are aspects where deregulation and legislation have not caught up." The moderating ACI World delegate closed the session by expressing that "Regulations and quarantine conditions differ from country to country, but the challenge for the future is whether it can be simplified and standardized according to global standards, as advocated by ACI and ICAO."

6. Ancillary Session（Commercial Innovation to Increase Consumption and Enhance Customer Experiencs Before and During Travel）

In this session, representatives from Spirit Airlines, United Airlines, JFK International Air Terminal, Manchester Airport Group, aviation-related consultants, and telecommunications carriers took the stage for a discussion focused on next-generation innovations, including e-commerce platforms to improve customer experience and increase consumption, cutting-edge payment methods including cryptocurrencies, and contactless retail and queue management.

In an introduction of intiatives at the newest passenger terminal at New York JFK Airport, there was development of an e-commerce platform which allows passengers to use digital devices (mainly smartphones) to shop at the airport before their journey, for example by making a pre-order at a restaurant, with other speakers also mentioning the likelihood of advanced parking lot reservations and in-flight services, such as mobile orders, becoming mainstream in the future.

7. The FTE Biometrics & Digital Identity Summit (Case Study and Panel Discussion)

On the final day of the event, the agenda consisted of case studies of biometrics-related implementation led by NEC, the main sponsor, with a panel discussion afterward. In the first part of the program, case studies of ① collaboration between U.S. Custom and Border Protection (CBD) and TSA, ② Star Alliance, Lufthansa, SITA, and NEC's Star Alliance, and ③ JAL's TOKYO 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games were introduced.

In Case ①, while it depends on the region of the U.S., TSA, CBP, and airport companies are working closely together using effective biometric authentication at security checkpoints for identity verification and departure control, reducing passenger queues and wait times, which, it was emphasized, contributes to an imporved customer experience. Additionally, according to the ② Star Alliance case study, the introduction of devices such as E-Gates equipped with biometric authentication would certainly impose a large cost burden to airport companies and airlines. However, emphasis was placed on the fact that it'd be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to dramatically change the layout of the airport, and a great benefit that would lead to a drastic revision of airport functions and an improved customer experience.

In the second part of the program, representatives from

Delta Air Lines, Seattle Airport, TSA, Mastercard and public health agencies took the stage for a panel discussion on how to promote and successfully expand new digital ID and biometric initiatives globally. Here too, as was firmly stressed throughout the event, there was emphasis on building a close cooperative relationship between government agencies such as CBP and TSA (particularly the Immigration section of CIQ if in Japan) and private companies such as airport companies and airlines, as well as the utmost importance and great challenge of how to simply integrate different specifications depending on the country and manufacturer, including each nation's regulation and approval related to the protection and reliability of personal data. These stood in the way like a large wall before the pandemic, but with the momentum of drastic checkpoint function revisions due to COVID-19, dramatic improvements can be expected in the next few years, which drew the session to a close with a big round of applause from the audience.

8. Conclusion

While I participated in this year's event with the expectation that it would be an opportunity to experience cutting-edge technology and discussions of the four themes mentioned above, especially in the fields of "Future Airports" and "Digital and Innovation," because the subject of COVID-19 and the post-coronavirus era are of particular interest, in reality, both parts of the session and the exhibition focused a large amount of time and space centered on "biometric authentication's" "touchless" and "efficient" capabilities. In every session, airport companies and airlines pressed improving efficiency by introducing biometric authentication technology to eliminate staff shortages and reduce costs, serving as a glimpse of a post-coronavirus future where airport congestion will be eliminated and the cost reduction/labor savings that occur under labor shortages will progress at an accelerated pace.

Even in Japan, it is still a fresh memory that the face recognizing "Face Express" was partially introduced at both Narita and Haneda airports in time for the Olympics. Such technology will be promoted all over the globe, and if you can imagine a post-corona world where you can do smart check-in with biometric authentication at any airport, I've come to realize that a "Future Airport" will become a reality not too long from now.

Although it will still require some time to create reliable personal data protection, coordinate regulations and government agencies in each country, integrate biometric authentication standards, recover from the pandemic, and to be chosen as an airport in the post-corona era and survive, I was able to reconfirm that comprehensive checkpoint functions using the latest technology are indispensable for improving the customer experience through this event.

Personally, I have great expectations for the future of Virgin Group's Hyperloop and United Airlines' Supersonic businesses, and starting with this event, would like to keep an eye on cutting-edge technology trends that will lead the aviation and airport fields.

（Event Images）

（1） IDEMIA's "E-Gate" introduced at LAS's ACE (Advancing the Checkpoint Environment)
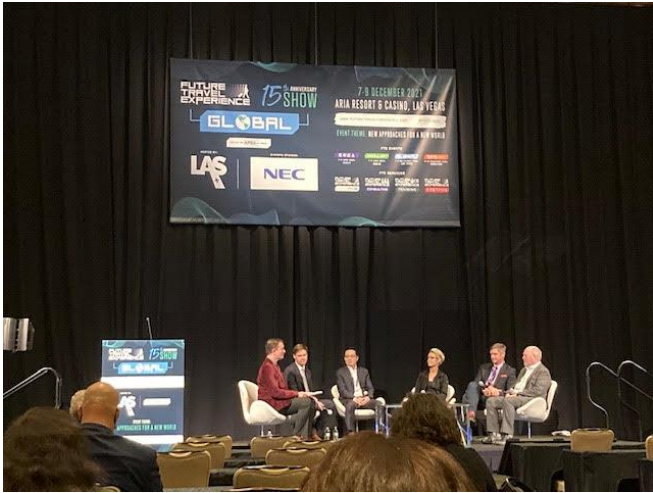
(2) Panel Discussion

(3) NEC Exhibition Booth