

The way back

This is a special feature from *PAX International's* [October 2020 digital edition](#).



IFSA APEX CEO Joe leader

In early October, efforts to provide additional funding for US airlines and related companies were still in a state of great uncertainty, but two associations that represent a worldwide industry of companies and carriers were moving toward the future with greater brand alignment and a shared vision.

The [Airline Passenger Experience Association \(APEX\)](#) and the [International Flight Services Association \(IFSA\)](#) launched new websites and a pair of similar logos tying the two groups that first joined forces in 2017. Add the [Future Travel Experience](#) and they represent a seamless transition, each with specialties that support passengers from the airport and airside through to onboard service and food and beverage.

“We have been very proud to see IFSA’s strength alongside APEX,” Joe Leader tells *PAX International* in early October., “We work in tandem.,” says the CEO of the two Associations.

One of the triumphs of the two groups working together, Leader says, was the “government action initiative” earlier this year that resulted in \$3 billion in funding from the initial Coronavirus Aid, Relief,

and Economic Security (CARES) Act for related industries. A similar initiative was stalled in Congress in early October, which calls for funding in the area of US\$28 billion, with US\$3 billion set aside for caterers and suppliers. If approved, the funding would be a lifeline, carrying the industry through to the end of next March.

“We want to see governments helping support an industry that they have stopped from moving for far too long,” Leader says. “We need to get back to more normal travel. It is through no fault of their own that these airlines have been stopped on the vast majority of their routes.”

What has not stalled is the [2020 APEX/FTE Virtual Expo](#), launching online December 8 to 9, 2020. When *PAX International* spoke to Leader, organizers had signed up 114 airlines and more than 100 airport representatives to take part in the panel discussions and to browse virtual exhibits that will be first available online in December and continue into the new year.

Based on initial signups, a group of delegates will represent a full spectrum of the cabin service industry. Leader says airline representatives and leaders in inflight connectivity, entertainment and food and beverage have shown interest in the event which could signal something of a return to familiar inflight service.



In place of quarantines and blockades, active COVID-19 testing by airlines will help open up travel. Here, United Airlines is testing a passenger at SFO

“It is nice because I cannot wait to see a bit more selection, variety and service on our airlines returning soon,” Leader says.

With each passing month, Leader says he sees encouraging signs. American Airlines recently announced it would return some elements of its food service selection, and the airline has been successful in keeping virus infection rates low among its cabin crew - lower, in fact, than its office workers.

“Having that kind of data point showing that you can safely serve customers I think is very important,” Leader adds.

Additional sophistication in tracking and testing for COVID-19 among the airlines is also taking shape in the industry as airlines announce they will begin offering testing for their passengers. In late September, [American Airlines](#), [United Airlines](#), [JetBlue Airways](#) and [Hawaiian Airlines](#) all began rolling out pre-flight testing that could supply results in anywhere from a few minutes to a few days. Such knowledge and diagnoses would allow travelers to avoid quarantine restrictions at various destinations.

“I believe that we’ll see a resurgence (in travel) especially with the testing initiatives that have been put forth recently where we will be moving for quickly in Q4 toward testing, (instead of) quarantine and blockades,” Leader says “It is the right approach.”