

Touching on touchless at FTE APEX Virtual Expo



Clockwise from top, Dan McCoy of the TSA; George Merritt of Denver International Airport; Dave McCormick of Alaska Airlines; Dave Wilson of the Port of Seattle and Frank Barich of Barich, Inc.

The pandemic triggered a wave of innovations born of necessity. Now, airports and the airlines that operate there are looking at the year ahead, honing their efforts to create a safe travel experience that will be highly dependent on technology.

Moderating the panel discussion was Dave Wilson Director of Innovation at the [Port of Seattle](#). Joining him online was Dave McCormick, Managing Director, Product & Design at [Alaska Airlines](#); George Merritt, Senior Vice President of Strategic Operations at [Denver International Airport](#); Daniel McCoy, Chief Innovation Officer at the [Transportation Security Administration](#); and Frank Barich, Principal, [Barich, Inc.](#), a consulting firm.

With headquarters in Seattle, Alaska Airlines and the Port of Seattle worked together to support passengers in the Emerald City. Seattle-Tacoma International Airport (SEA) at the outbreak of the pandemic launched a program called “Fly Healthy at SEA,” placing 300 hand sanitizers around the airport. Wilson says that during the past year, SEA employees distributed more than two million facemasks and installed hundreds of protective barriers. The airport employed a sensor that could take a person’s temperature up to 10 feet away by pinpointing tear ducts.

The dining experience is being made safer with the help of a company called [Grab](#). Passengers are able to buy the food with a phone app and pick it up at a counter without exchanging documents. At kiosks, a device placed over a screen allows passengers to select the commands and keep fingers one-to-two centimeters above the screen.

The airport’s home carrier is Alaska Airlines. It is working with SEA on a reservations system for checking in and passing through checkpoints. Wilson says the goal is to reduce check-in time to 10 to 15 minutes. In addition to shortening the time, the reservations system frees up space where passengers would normally be queuing. It is a pilot project in the midst of a 120-day run.

Alaska Airlines will be blocking middle seats in its premium class cabins through this month. McCormick talked about the airline's Next Level Care program that evaluated 100 touch points that the airline changed for safety.

During the process, the airline experienced a huge amount interest for its app. Alaska Airlines also launched a program for touchless baggage tag printing from its kiosks.

"We have gone decades in days when it comes to digital adoption," McCormick says. The airline has stepped up its communication with its passengers, attempting to consistently inform them on health requirements at their destinations, such as Hawaii.

At DEN in Denver, officials have been at work for several years on a 17-lane checkpoint that directs passengers through the process using biometrics and data analytics. When the pandemic hit, Merritt says the airport worked with a subcontractor to develop a health conscious pathway through the airport.

At first, Merritt says DEN wanted to focus on vulnerable passengers. When that proved too difficult, the airport developed an app called VeriFLY that can reserve a spot in the TSA security line. That reservation gives check-in passengers access to a separate screening lane and a limited-capacity underground train car. Travelers who want to take advantage of the options the app provides have to complete a health and temperature screening on the day of travel.

At the TSA, McCoy says the group is looking to the future with a couple programs as it staffs up for the summer travel season. The TSA is focusing on Credential Authentication Technology (CAT), where the passenger interacts with the agent to provide photo identity when passing through security. Readers have been developed that can be turned toward the passenger, eliminating handling of identification by the TSA agent.

The TSA also has two pilot projects with vendors on UVC cleaning check points, focusing on bins that hold passenger possessions for screening.

"We really see coming out of this (pandemic) as an opportunity to reassess the technology that we have in place and start to design that checkpoint of the future," McCoy says.

At his firm in Chandler, Arizona, Barich assists airports with IT strategic planning and design and works with a number of organizations such as [Airports Council International](#) and the [International Air Transport Association](#). Barich has firsthand experience participating in a biometric event with the US Department of Homeland Security. There, he experienced cutting-edge facial recognition technology that can identify 90 percent of passengers, even when masked. Seven companies are developing technology for the process.

Looking into the future, Barich says he has been working with the groups, airports and airlines on handling passenger health credentials. The other priorities have been within the airport to reduce waiting time through virtual queuing.

"We have the opportunity here, producing a long term approach. A new business, reducing the queues throughout the airport facility and that sustainability. That is a long term business process and business approach that will live beyond the pandemic. Many airports are excited about that option," Barich says.