

Digitally armed for future travel

This is a special feature from PAX Tech's [July 2021 Cabin Hygiene, Seating & IFEC](#) digital edition.



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In the middle of June, European nations began an aggressive effort to lure back leisure travelers hoping to salvage what is left of the summer travel season.

The first intrepid souls that will take the challenge will need to be armed with the latest information, documents and take the initiative to be fully tested and vaccinated when it is required. [The International Air Transport Association](#) and the [Airline Passenger Experience Association](#) are both playing important roles to kick off the process.

“For most of the world, travel remains a maze of COVID-19 testing requirements and vaccination requirements that are not aligned,” says Dr. Joe Leader, CEO of APEX. He has seen firsthand the results of the outcome for passengers who were denied boarding without proper testing and communication with officials at their destination.

“Had that been submitted digitally in advance, the mistake would have been caught in time to fix,” Leader points out. “Instead, the passengers were delayed for 24 hours.”

For a digital solution to work, Leader says information needs to be securely passed between appropriate applications. For example, he says, an airline travel pass should be accepted by government passport control and other end-to-end solutions as needed. Having multiple apps do the same COVID-19 safety objectives on the same trip do not best serve passenger experience. Simplicity, ease, and security should be the rule that providers take with one another.

One solution that has had wide acceptance from all corners of the travel industry is the Travel Pass

from the International Air Transport Association. The [app debuted in March with Singapore Airlines](#) between Changi and London Heathrow. IATA now reports that 71 airlines have joined the trial covering 151 international routes.

Nick Careen Senior Vice President Airport Passenger Cargo and Security says the app has been in the Apple Store selection since March and is now in the Google Play Store as well. IATA has added features to improve user experience and facilitate seamless integration with airlines' apps and government health portals.

With the improvements, users can upload more than one travel itinerary, locate testing labs, send their COVID-19 test results or proof of vaccine straight to airlines, airport, and border authorities. They can also create a digital version of their passport using the machine-readable zone info (MRZ). In addition, the app is now able to manage COVID-19 vaccination certificates, with the first operational trial to test this scheduled in July.

Reopening borders without the need for quarantine is vital to opening up the world as a whole says Careen. Now wait times are long, and airports are not up to adequate staffing. Airlines themselves are having trouble staffing up. American Airlines this past week canceled hundreds of flights that could not be crewed.

“Without an automated solution for COVID-19 checks, there is enormous potential for significant airport disruptions on the horizon,” says Careen. “Already, average passenger processing and waiting times have doubled from what they were pre-crisis during peak time—reaching an unacceptable three hours.”