

Road to recovery: Conversation with APEX CEO Dr. Joe Leader

This is a special feature from *PAX Tech's* 2022 [October APEX EXPO issue](#) on [page 22](#).



APEX CEO Dr. Joe Leader

The APEX/IFSA Expo October 25-27 in Long Beach, California promises visitors not only a larger event but a glimpse into the future in several segments of the passenger experience.

PAX Tech caught up with APEX/IFSA CEO, Dr. Joe Leader shortly after attending a successful Future Travel Experience event in Las Vegas. This year's APEX/IFSA Expo is being held just before another FTE event in Singapore before closing out the year. What he says he's found through travel is an industry moving fast into new technological advancements on the ground and in the air. Airlines are rapidly refurbishing and expanding fleets while wrestling with the worldwide problem of staffing shortages.

All those issues will be discussed by an industry delegation that has grown from last year's event and returned to Long Beach. In late September, APEX/IFSA had secured 119 exhibitors, which was a 31 percent increase from the 2021 event. The EXPO will see an estimated 25 increase in attendance with more than 2,000 people registered. A group of 50 airlines will bring an estimated 300 people to Long Beach.

Air travel is, without a doubt ramping up as the pent-up demand of people who long to be again on the move. However, Leader sees much of the industry snapping back quickly as a mixed blessing.

"It kind of was a combination of my highest aspiration and worst fears, all in one," he says. What has been learned, he says, is the pitfalls of shutting down such a vital sector of travel results in the monumental task of returning operations to normal. Government help stalled in many parts of the world, and now the industry is in critical need to fill its ranks of workers. But the challenge of moving passengers efficiently is being partially met with technology in the face of staff shortages.

"Biometrics is ramping up by storm around the world," Leader says. Automated check-in and bag drops will make it easier for passengers to move through the travel process. At FTE in Las Vegas visitors saw the future of payment with Amazon Go tracking purchases automatically without the need for a cashier.

APEX will be hosting a biometrics panel in Long Beach with representatives from Los Angeles World Airports, Star Alliance and others associated with customer experience.

This year's event comes at a promising time for suppliers as airlines are busy acquiring new aircraft. Leader cited Ryanair's order of 52 aircraft in a single year and United's purchase and/or refurbishment plans for 100 aircraft. In the cabin, airlines like Air New Zealand are reshaping the passenger experience with lie-flat bed options (see page 16) that Leader said holds the promise for meaningful change in the Economy cabin.

"Between the extraordinarily expensive Business Class seats and Economy and Premium Economy seats there is going to be something in between that can give (passengers) the option to rest onboard an ultra-long-haul flight," Leader says.

On the International Flight Services Association side of the event, planners will be showing interested visitors the new World Food Safety Guidelines. Organizers are looking to get speakers from government and the industry together for a discussion on maintaining and improving food safety.