

## *Physical distance creates need for emotional proximity* – Understanding Covid-19 as a trigger for a future digitally engaged customer journey

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“Airport operators are prioritizing the health of passengers and staff first and foremost and, while it is hoped that the global health crisis will recede well before the year ends, it is possible that the economic impact could persist into 2021” (Airports Council International, 2020).

Not only will the economic downturn accompany us for a longer period of time, but also **airport operators and passengers will have to adjust to new circumstances and permanently installed measures** when passing through their travel journey. With catastrophic declines in traffic numbers, either near-total or complete closure of infrastructure and standstill of airline operations, airports have been hit particularly hard.

### Expected traffic and revenue losses for YE 2020

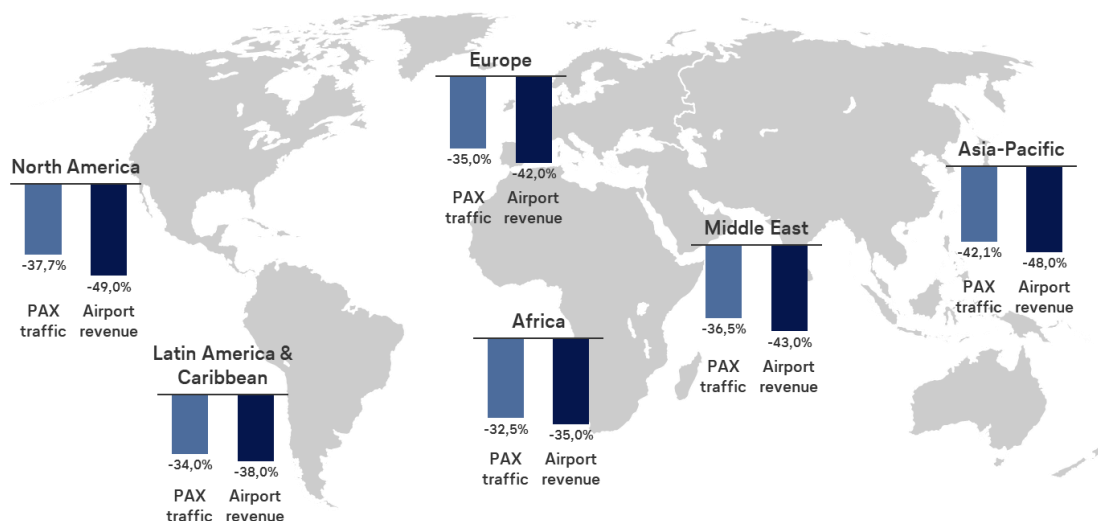


Figure 1. **Estimated airport passenger traffic and revenue loss for YE 2020**

Source: Lufthansa Consulting based on figures published by Airports Council International, 2020

Although airports around the world, such as recently *Seattle-Tacoma*, *Newcastle International* or *Hong Kong International*, are gradually expecting the return of scheduled flights in June and July, they are still empty at this time and by the end of 2020 will have welcomed and handled an average of 38.1% fewer passengers (Airports Council International, 2020). Not only does this outlook confront airports and their responsible authorities with existential fears, it also relates to a lasting and highly unsettling impact on people and passengers. **Not least media-driven, passengers will likely have a queasy and uncomfortable feeling when using an airport for a long time**, be insecure and, in case of doubt, avoid situations perceived as risky such as crowds, personal contacts or queues.

While initially there was an expectation that the recovery phase would be ‘V’-shaped, as occurred following SARS in 2003/04, current forecasts and projections indicate that a ‘U’-shaped or a ‘W’-shaped recovery with a second dip seem to be the more likely course. After the Global Financial

Crisis in 2008, it took approximately 7 years for passenger volumes to recover in the United States ('U'-shape) as compared to nearly 2 years in the European Union ('V'-shape). Due to the much greater severity of the Corona crisis however, the bottom of the 'U' will probably be longer and ultimately resemble an 'L', accompanied by a recovery that will take years to complete.

### 1. At least until the end of Q1 2021, stress will triumph over satisfaction

The stamina and adaptability of the industry and, above all, people will be put to the test.

**Passengers will have to get used to measures implemented by airports along the travel chain in the foreseeable future.**

Customer experience has always been of fundamental importance for any airport, not least because an increase of 1% in passenger experience (as defined in ACI's ASQ Survey) generates, on average, a growth of non-aeronautical revenues of 1.5% (Airports Council International, 2016). The passenger experience is created along the customer journey, in interaction with the airport's premises, processes and people at distinctive touch points – **touch points which post Covid-19 will be accompanied by subjectively perceived uncertainties, risks and stress levels:**



Figure 2. **Passenger stress level analysis for main customer journey touchpoints pre-Covid-19 versus post Covid-19**  
Source: Lufthansa Consulting

According to a survey by Swiss research agency *m1nd-set*, **80% of all international passengers will get back on the plane within the first 6 months after gradual relaxation of measures and flight restrictions.** More than one in five even say they want to fly again as soon as possible. Against this background, the above reference "Post Covid-19" as well as the associated uncertainties and increased stress levels of passengers can be initially understood for a period of 6 to 9 months from the relaxation of the measures, **i.e. for the time being up to and including the first quarter of 2021.** Critical will be those points within the airport journey that are characterized by a large number or gathering of people, longer waiting times and personal closeness – above all the security checks, queues in arrival halls (e.g. at check-in or bag drop), as well as gate areas and boarding procedures. About 40% of international passengers will continue to visit airport shops. Of the 60% of people who do not intend to do so, only 15% cite corona, and thus fear of infection, as a reason. Dwell time,

shopping, eating within retail areas will consequently remain important post Covid-19 contact and gathering points (Airport World, 2020).

## 2. Airport ambitions and requirements will meet passenger needs post Covid-19

It will be at these touch points, that airport ambitions collide with new or amended needs and wishes of passengers:

Airport ambitions and requirements post Covid-19	Passenger needs post Covid-19
Health, security and well-being of all passengers and visitors	Sense of <b>personal security</b> and <b>frictionless guidance</b> and wayfinding
Adherence to <b>officially ordered measures</b> around <b>social distancing, avoidance of crowds</b> and <b>hygiene</b>	Increased <b>all-round</b> and <b>24/7 information</b> regarding waiting times, travel times, flight information etc.
Staff management including <b>education, wellbeing</b> and <b>health monitoring</b>	Increased <b>personal space</b>
<b>Cleanliness</b> and creation of a <b>welcome atmosphere</b>	Perceived <b>wellness</b> and a <b>pleasant atmosphere</b> in waiting areas, such as gates
<b>Seamless air travel</b> and streamlined <b>customer journey</b>	<b>Minimum personal / human contact</b> , i.e. seamless and frictionless travel - <b>touchless technology</b>
<b>Rapid recovery</b> and <b>income generation</b>	<b>Streamlined travel journey</b> , i.e. minimum queueing and waiting times, fast processing
Disclosure of <b>potential new income sources</b> post crisis	<b>Comprehensibility</b> and <b>traceability</b> of measures taken (including communication)
	More <b>hygiene</b> and <b>washing facilities</b> , places to <b>disinfect</b> hands, face, luggage etc.

With special importance following Covid-19

Figure 3. *Airport ambitions and requirements post Covid-19 versus passenger needs post Covid-19*

Source: Lufthansa Consulting

## 3. Physical measures first, digital engagement then

While all expected airport measures have an increased isolation and personal distance among passengers in common, **the art will be to deploy them in an innovative way to create digitally driven emotional proximity with simultaneous adherence to physical distance.** The aim must be to shift the previously shown stress curve back towards satisfaction. *Figure 4* respectively illustrates possible solutions and initiatives alongside the customer journey differentiated by customer and airport focus and including a horizon for possible implementation.

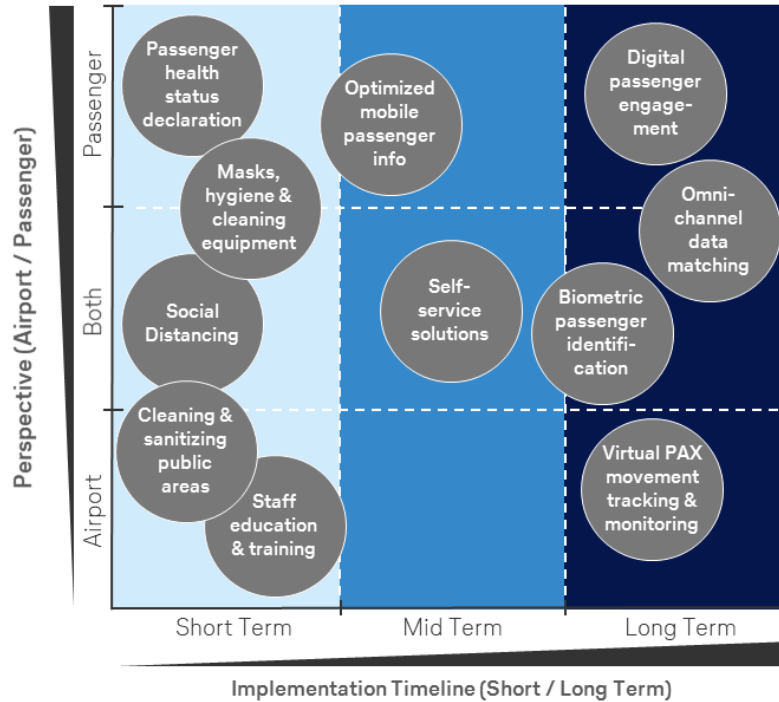


Figure 4. Airport solutions and initiatives alongside the customer journey post Covid-19  
Source: Lufthansa Consulting

While short-term measures such as increased distances, temperature screening or sanitizing are inherently physical in nature and have already been implemented, operational adaptations with a strategic and digital component such as the deployment of seamless and touchless identification technology will only be fully feasible in the long term. **Covid-19 can however be seen as another trigger and push to steer the focus and corresponding investments towards digital commitment in the future.** While *Etihad Airways* trials kiosk systems for contact and touchless passenger health screenings to take a step forward towards post Corona airport operations, *Brisbane Airport* developed and launched a full online marketplace in just 16 days in an attempt to support tenants across its domestic and international terminals and digitally connect them with buyers. Touchless, distant, digitally engaged, emotionally close (International Airport Review, 2020).

The need already existing before Covid-19 to direct investments towards technology and digitalization will continue to exist and be intensified after Covid-19. Those airports, that in addition to prioritizing passenger health will be able to mitigate emerging uncertainties through innovative technologies, will ultimately be the first to restore a pleasant customer journey. **The road to success will be a continuous compromise between personal distance and digitally driven emotional proximity,** between social isolation and a convergence of all stakeholders actively involved in the customer journey. At first glance a contradiction, at second glance an exciting challenge.

*To learn more and discuss how your organization could benefit from Lufthansa Consulting's expertise on Crisis Recovery, please get in touch at [APcrisis-solutions@LHConsulting.com](mailto:APcrisis-solutions@LHConsulting.com). Together, we can make it through to better days.*



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