



You're cleared for takeoff

Making the most of the travel industry rebound

Ice on the runway

2020 was a tough year, and while it was bad for almost everyone, no industry felt it in the same way as travel and hospitality. **Statista reports** that hotel occupancy rates were down to just 48.3% (from 70%) since October 2019. (That's way too many empty rooms.)

Meanwhile, the **International Air Transport Association** (IATA) reported that global air travel industry revenues barely topped \$400 billion (down from \$838B). Losing half your revenue in one year is unprecedented, and enough to make many travel brand leaders head for the hills... if it was possible to get that far. Some sectors were able to weather the storm alright, but no one was left completely unscathed.

To make things worse, many travelers have been disengaged and fearful, and slimmer marketing budgets have made producing the massive amounts of content needed to assuage those fears very difficult. On top of that, the contracting industry has made surviving competition fiercer than ever.

Then you've got the constant stream of "can we or can't we" travel updates that frequently scuttle plans before they can even start to form. Governments make abrupt domestic announcements at home or abroad which can cause travelers to adopt a wait-and-see attitude.

There's no denying it: being a travel marketer is a tough gig right now. So how can you folks book a trip to brighter days?



The travel and hospitality industry has weathered many catastrophic events, such as 9/11 and the Great Recession, and in every circumstance, travel always climbed back and flourished.



SooHo Choi, Global Travel and Hospitality Lead, **Publicis Sapient**

Cleared for takeoff

Good news: there's new hope to be had.

COVID-19 vaccines are being rolled out across the globe while many communities have learned how to live safely through the pandemic, adhering to medically sound best practices like hand washing, social distancing, and wearing masks. For everyone, but most especially those that continued to shelter in place, a need to travel has been building inside that is more powerful than an active volcano in a pressure cooker.

Capitalizing on that pent-up demand should be like shooting fish in a pickle jar then, yes? You'd think so, but while the opportunity may be there, it will not be an easy moment to seize. With stiff competition from long-hungry travel companies and the shifting sands of what's safe vs. not, providing an excellent customer experience matters now more than ever. This is a critical time to pay attention to your messaging, to put it at the heart of your customer journey. The right message is the key to turning clicks into loyal customers for life.

Smart brands like [Virgin Atlantic](#) have torn down their channel-focused marketing siloes and reorganized their entire marketing team around the end-to-end customer experience. And it's not the only one – a lot of our customers are moving in this direction because they realize that the full customer journey is everyone's responsibility.

There's never been a better time than now to improve your CX. The good news is that the control tower has already given the signal. We're cleared for takeoff, and there's no need to wait any longer to start our taxi down the runway to recovery. The people are ready to move, and now's the time to take a look at every part of your customer experience and make sure each touchpoint is fully optimized for the best performance.

Read on to see how it's done...



I continue to be optimistic, as we're seeing a lot of pent-up travel demand. Now that people realize travel can be taken away, they're not going to put off trips like they used to.



Frederick Lalonde, CEO, [Hopper](#)



1) Give travelers permission to dream

Travelers may not know it, but they need "permission to dream." In many cases, they've been waiting for months to start seriously planning the trips they've put off for at least a year. Spark their imaginations by painting a picture for them of what a perfect holiday looks like. After all, today's dream becomes tomorrow's purchase.

There are three ways to get them dreaming:

a) Show them how they can relax on a dream vacation.

Be careful not to show people in large crowds – they might not be ready for that just yet! But a family relaxing on a secluded beach might be just the ticket.

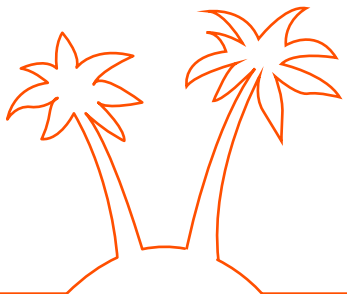
b) Remind them of their families.

Families have been kept apart for months. Grandparents are itching to hold their grandchildren, friends are longing to catch up, and there's a huge catharsis waiting for us all as we embrace our loved ones again for the first time in a long time. Tap into that emotion to get travelers dreaming (and booking).

c) Keep them dreaming, but reassure them too.

Travelers have been living with fear for months, and it's not going to magically disappear overnight. So, show them the possibilities and remind them of the good times, but always remember to reassure them along the way about the things you're doing to ensure their health and safety.

Giving that permission to dream is about more than advertising your products and services; it's about helping future travelers understand how you will be there to help them deliver on the promise of a much needed holiday. Once they know how they can be protected as they reconnect, they will be much more likely to jump aboard a flight to parts unknown.



2) Drive engagement from the very beginning

Ads are typically a one-way experience: you show them something, they take it in and then decide whether or not to buy.

But as we've said, the battle for eye share as the travel rebound ramps up will be fierce. Every other brand will be attempting to engage the same consumers you are, so conservative and uninspired marketing just won't cut it. More than ever the goal needs to favor connecting with the audience over simply showing them things they might like. In other words: **now's the time to go big.**



I'm sure there's going to be tremendous competition, and we'll rise to it.

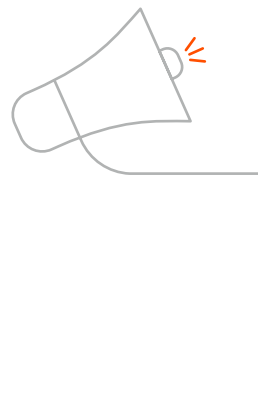


Shai Weiss, CEO, **Virgin Atlantic**



A great example of driving customer engagement from the very beginning is [this ad](#) by our phriends in the phrozen phjords of Iceland. Here we see them turn into the skid of COVID-19 isolation by promoting "scream therapy." Rather than discussing its merits or showing examples, users are instead asked to join in and deliver mighty screams of their own! They have put up speakers in picturesque parts of the country where you can view a live stream of your powerful yell being unleashed (along with many others that may surprise you if you don't watch out).

In doing this, fans get to spend more time on their site. They can read about the benefits of scream therapy and listen to other peoples' screams which are surprisingly easy to translate across languages. But more than that, potential customers also get to view Iceland itself through the images and videos on display around the site. You might be looking for a speaker to yell through, but you're also connecting with the natural beauty waiting for you in the "Land of Fire and Ice." Give your fans a reason to click and participate, boosting their desire to hear more.



3) Optimize EVERY part of the customer journey (even if it doesn't belong to you)

Let's say you're an airline. The customer journey starts with searching for flights and ends when they arrive at their destination, right?

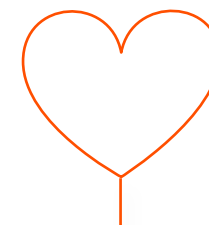
Yes – but there's no reason you can't take it a step further and think about what your customers experience after they leave you. Brands like Singapore Air are trying to offer value to their customers even after they've left the airport. The **Kris+ app** makes it easy for customers to access rewards like discounts for dining, retail and entertainment. Imagine getting off the plane and heading to your hotel, wondering what you're going to have for dinner. Then you see a discount waiting for you at a well-reviewed restaurant nearby – all you have to do is show up and save. That holistic look at the end-to-end customer experience is what inspires long-term customer loyalty and keeps customers engaging with you during and in between their trips.



4) Stay sensitive and deliver the right message



We're sure it'll be easier than ever to empathize with your customers right now; you've both been through a LOT. But how do you translate that empathy into your marketing efforts? How do you say the right thing when it's more important than ever?



Here are some ways we recommend:

a) Address safety head-on.

Travel consumers have important health & safety questions about laying out their future travel plans. Though they're itching to travel, they've been carrying around a great deal of fear that won't have completely dissipated overnight.

You can help by becoming a trusted source of comprehensively researched answers to these questions as best practices and procedures around the world continue to change:

- Where is safe to travel?
- Will a quarantine be required?
- How safe is it there?
- Can I remain safe while flying?
- Which hotels and vacation rentals are following protocols?
- What can we even do when we get there?

Take advantage of powerful tools like [Google's Travel Insights](#) to remain up-to-date on changes in every part of the world and build your marketing system around knowledge and safety.

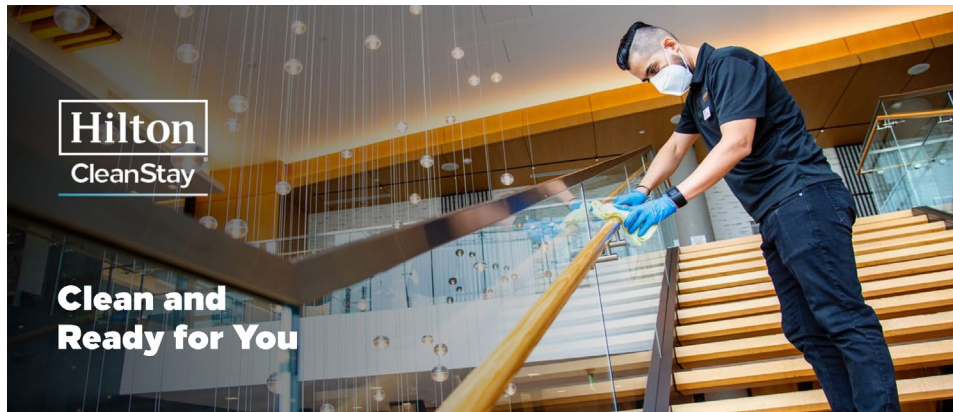


This video from ixigo acts as a strong reminder to viewers that flying safely is absolutely possible, so long as travelers take necessary precautions. It lays out what those precautions are and invites viewers to understand what to expect during the flow of plane travel.

We wouldn't have thought to ask the world's most famous plumber, but this Mario guy clearly knows his stuff. Fun approaches like this provide a little guidance to how the door to dialogue can be nudged open in creative, consumer-centric ways.



b) Show how you've adapted.



This is the only time in history where your travelers are going to want to hear a lot about your cleaning procedures, so if you're taking extra precautions (and we know you are), say so! **This ad from Hilton** is a good example – the mask, the gloves, cleaning a high-touch surface, the word "clean" appearing twice – it's pretty reassuring!

Also, if you've got contactless options across your customer touchpoints, now's the time to trumpet them. And if you don't have them, then you probably need to go take a good hard look at that! The more touchpoints that can be controlled by a user's own mobile phone, the safer they'll feel.

c) Be nice. Be forgiving. Say thanks a lot.

COVID-19 has been a traumatic time for travelers, especially as they were suddenly beset with cancellations and refunds if not outright sickness. This is a second chance to shift to policies that put customers first and communicate in a more open way that is free of obfuscation and uncertainty. Now's not the time for strict cancellation policies; refunds, reschedulings and forgiveness need to flow freely from brand to traveler in order to build back that trust. (And some incentivizing "thank you" wouldn't hurt either.)

d) Don't stress them out.

Did you know that 48% of consumers report that marketing can make them feel angry, 39% that it can make them feel inadequate, 38% that it can make them feel anxious, and 38% that it can make them feel sad? Your brand absolutely cannot afford to have those negative emotions generated by your ads right now (**or ever, really**). Travelers need a break from their astronomical stress, a break that you as a travel brand can help provide. Don't mess it up by using high-pressure sales tactics. Keep your voice and tone kind and gentle.

And of course, remain sensitive in both visuals and language to the evolving understanding of COVID-19. It is possibly the most important line to walk, striking the right balance of empathy and effectiveness in your marketing. Keep this front-of-mind with your travel rebound strategy and in every campaign you launch going forward. **Emotions matter** now more than ever.



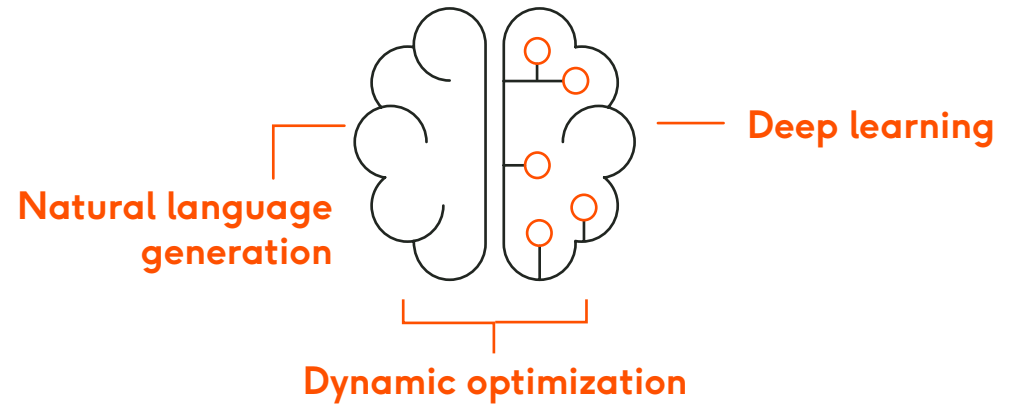
e) Use the right tools for the job.

Implement powerful tools like artificial intelligence to revolutionize customer experiences through Brand Language Optimization.

Learn exactly what moves your audience, and connect with them effortlessly across multiple channels. Gaining deep, useful data with every send could teach you about new ways to fill the marketing funnel with potential customers.

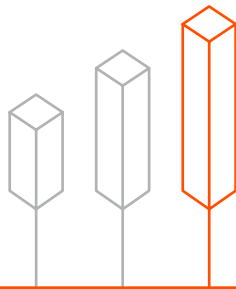
"Subject line performance quickly educated us how certain brand language could be adapted to include specific terms that were previously believed not to be a good fit."

- Phillip Wright, Former Sr. Director Customer Engagement Platforms, **Hilton**



As they spend more time online in both work and play, the best way to reach customers is with a variety of suitable messaging present in every digital place they go. From emails and subject lines to social media and web ads, the most consistently effective content tool is on-brand copy built from bespoke language models of your brand's unique voice.

Best of all, a deep learning engine (like Phrasee's) can generate useful data from its testing and implementation phases, increasing knowledge of what language works best for your brand. Phrasee begins to pay for itself from the moment it's activated by increasing ROI and generating more income from marketing dollars spent. It's one of the best tools for the job because Phrasee helps brands **say it better**.



Phrasee increased Virgin Holidays email open rates by 2 percentage points, and that 2 percentage points of incremental open uplift has generated several million pounds in additional revenue from their email marketing channel.



Saul Lopes, Former Head of CRM, **Virgin Holidays**

5) Delight your superphans.



Customer Lifetime Value (CLV) is jet fuel for travel brands.

The travel rebound will bring with it cause for concern as competitors make a concerted effort to chip away at your market share to grow their own in the days ahead. Rather than focusing on "getting them first," we recommend tightening your grip on the customers you already have.

"I want to do all the things that give us customers for life."

- Doreen Burse, SVP of worldwide sales, [United](#)

The [Yotpo Global Consumer Survey](#) indicates that consumer brand loyalty is riding high on the heels of the COVID-19 crisis. Fearful consumers are much less happy taking bets on new brands, and far more inclined to trust whomever was there for them in the past. This is positive news given the strained relationships between many travel brands and travelers.

The speed of the spread of the virus and the wild uncertainty during the early days of the pandemic left many would-be travelers dealing with convoluted refund processes, ever-changing restrictions, and even entire countries being shut down. It's safe to say some feelings (and bank accounts) were hurt in the fracas.

"In our industry, no one bought travel insurance for road trips. But we saw people worrying about losing money if for some reason they couldn't go."

- Carol Mueller, Spokesperson, [Berkshire Hathaway](#)

Luckily, many are willing to show their favorite and most trusted brands a little empathy given the circumstances. They want to let the past be the past and toast to a new future, preferably somewhere warm with umbrella drinks. Travel brands only need to make sure to give them a good reason to do so.

Here are some ways you can further deepen your relationship with those loyal customers (and maybe get them to bring their friends along for the ride):

Relaunch your loyalty program with better perks.

Expand special incentives to the most loyal customers.

Partner with other brands to create packages for entire trips.

Use your support team to grant powerful bonuses to aggrieved customers.

Create offers specifically for those that bring new customers in.

Give "Thank You" packages and discounts wherever possible.

This is the time to expand your thinking in putting customer experience first. [React](#) is a product by Phrasee that makes it possible to stay top-of-mind throughout the customer lifecycle. By using triggered communications built inside your workflows, it is possible to motivate and reactivate customers at just the right moment with real-time Brand Language Optimization.

Attracting new customers to your brand during the travel rebound is a sensible goal, but not at the expense of the relationships you've already built. Instead, communicate and offer what matters most to the ones seeking to stick by you for their newest voyages.

6) Be proactive.

Speaking of superphans, while you're waiting for them to click that book button, isn't now a great time to survey your customers?

How wary are they of travel?

Where are they hoping to go on their next trip?

What kinds of things are important to them now?

What kinds of things would they like from you to make their travel experience even better?

Once you've got that data, you can start targeting and segmenting better. Imagine someone tells you they can't wait to visit their mom in Country X. You've just been alerted that travel restrictions in Country X have been lifted, and you're offering a discount! Now you can email them proactively, let them know they can travel there and that you have a sweet deal. Throw in a picture of family members hugging each other, and how can they resist?



Bon Voyage!

Whichever path you choose to navigate the coming travel rebound, we here at Phrasee salute you.

Our first ever customer was a travel brand, and we've had some awesome successes working in the space with [Virgin Atlantic](#), [Hilton](#) and [many others](#). It has not been easy watching our phriends in travel struggle so much during the pandemic. So regardless of whether you choose to check out our technology as you lay out your plans for the days ahead, we wish you nothing but the best.

The 2021 travel rebound is a golden opportunity for every brand that moves people. Be ready for it. Give your customers permission to dream of better times, teach them how to stay safe while respecting what hardships they've endured. Communicate with them as often and as accurately as possible to give them back the world. They deserve it after what they've been through this year, and you deserve all the good things that are coming in the days ahead.

If you want to know how Phrasee can help you and your brand reach your travel rebound marketing goals, [book a demo today](#).

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