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How to Increase Productivity in Your TMC During the Pandemic

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Introduction

Many travel management companies (TMCs) have had to restructure to survive in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Those that have seen their workforce diminished will face a new challenge once the crisis is over – keeping productivity high with fewer resources. The travel industry will play a huge role in helping to restore the economy once travel is viable again, and TMCs need to be prepared.

Let's explore how TMCs can hope to rebuild themselves once the crisis has subsided, what products will help them boost their output, and how Navitas is well-equipped to help struggling TMCs to focus their productivity in the right places to ensure success.

> " *The industry is starting to restructure – and the fortunate travel companies will pass from restructuring to rebuilding for a new normal.* "

accenture

The Effect of COVID-19 on TMCs

TMCs have faced insurmountable challenges in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak. Governments worldwide imposed strict overseas travel bans, mirroring the early moves made by corporations to keep travelling employees safe.

The ban on travel has financially crippled many TMCs, and for those companies their futures remain unclear. Many travel companies took advantage of the government's furlough scheme, but despite the recent extension until March 2021, it does little to reassure those that have already seen significant revenue losses.

TMCs employ over 12,000 people and generate more than £10 billion in revenue each year

Struggling TMCs have had to make cost-cutting decisions, including staff job losses. One such TMC, BCD Travel, is having to restructure due to the effects of the pandemic. This restructuring is expected to cost the company 3,000 jobs.

Many TMCs found themselves busy processing enormous volumes of refunds and credit when travel was banned, while maximising existing resources to help them secure their long-term survival.

Industry trade body the Business Travel Association (BTA) has already warned that TMCs face an existential threat if the crisis continues, or if recessions hit once the pandemic has abated.

Like so many other companies in the travel industry, BCD will be a smaller organisation coming out of the pandemic.

BCD travel

Challenges beyond COVID-19

Once the world returns to some form of normality, TMCs that have seen their workforce shrink will face a new challenge. TMCs will be needed again for business travel, maybe more urgently than ever before. Ensuring a smaller team can work productively is going to be crucial.

Many TMCs aren't in a position to prepare for that eventuality. How TMCs rebuild themselves at this critical time is going to be vital to their survival.

"

No TMC is built to withstand a 95% drop in transaction fees.

"

Patrick Linnihan
CEO, Gant Travel

How do TMCs Rebuild During and After COVID?

The effects of the pandemic on TMCs are devastating. However, it's possible for companies to adapt and rebuild throughout the global shutdown to give themselves the best chance of survival post–COVID-19.

Some TMCs have experience in acting quickly and decisively to secure their survival. And it is from there we can take inspiration. Common tactics include:

- Business restructuring
- Narrowing focus/offering
- Focus on customer experience
- Investing in automation
- Changing pricing models

"

When faced with a brick wall, we scaled it and reimagined our business. The corporate travel landscape on the other side will be different, but it's definitely not the last dance for any of us.

"

Marcus Eklund
Global Managing Director, FCM Travel Solutions

A Change in Focus

TMCs have much to offer business travellers wary of moving about during the COVID-19 pandemic. Managing traveller health and wellness in a pandemic is a strong option for TMCs struggling to find their position. Travel companies need to keep the traveller safe, but also their families and the wider population they interact with.

Risk management has now become more important than ever and ensuring people will be able to travel safely once they're able to, and return home safely, is a key service. This includes evaluating traveller risks, liaising with local embassies, and vetting travel providers.

TMCs can help offset the mental impact of COVID-19 as well, by providing accurate information surrounding:

- Recommended health and safety precautions for each step of the journey
- Flexible cancellations
- The restrictions of their destination
- Airline COVID-19 regulations

By shifting their focus to traveller wellbeing, TMCs continue to provide a valuable service to corporate travellers. Especially those feeling less confident about travel in the current climate. During the pandemic, the onus is squarely on the TMC when it comes to business travel to ensure the safety of their travellers and look after them on their journey – now, more than ever.

> *Corporate travellers like to know that you, as the travel advisor, has advised them correctly as to every aspect of the trip and will have their backs throughout the process.*

Lidia Folli
CEO, Bidtravel

Tackling the Question of Resources

TMCs are having to make hard decisions when it comes to cost-saving. Restructuring their business often means shrinking their workforce. Once business travel returns in full, smaller TMCs need to be more agile to boost their productivity to keep up with demand.

There are a few general ways a TMC can improve its productivity after the COVID-19 lockdown to make the most of its available resources.

Smarter Priorities and Restructuring

Many TMCs had to come to terms with restructuring their business during the COVID-19 pandemic, but it also forced them to determine what was, and wasn't, essential to their business. Beyond COVID-19, TMCs need to be smart about focusing their priorities to maximise what resources they have left.

Leaders should prioritise tasks that deliver value and communicate on them. Messaging throughout the TMC must emphasise why something is necessary to complete and what pain points it will remove for the workforce.

A Change in Leadership Approach

The relationship between employee and employer changed during the pandemic. Leadership styles were evaluated and transformed to meet the new and evolving needs of a remote workforce. When lockdown ends, it's imperative that leadership doesn't revert back to employers simply telling people what to do.

More effective communication from leaders and an emphasis on collaboration has empowered employees to make bolder decisions about their work. Giving employees within the TMC ownership over what they do will help make them more productive, while leadership simply needs to communicate their intent and desire for the business.

Develop Resilience Among Your Team

Once productivity has increased in your workforce, keeping it that way is crucial. The physical and mental well-being of teams has been tested during the pandemic.

It's important to help your team build up resilience as a collective, to help them not only get through lockdown and the immediate aftermath, but also to continue being as productive as before, if not more so. Resilience is developed and reinforced by helping your team to develop self-awareness and self-management techniques. Investing in the individual and the team as a whole are both vital to improving productivity.

Where can TMCs Improve on Productivity?

When looking to transform the way they work and streamline their processes, TMCs must identify the areas of their business most likely to be affected by a reduced workforce. Increasing productivity means increasing output and being able to keep up with demand even with fewer agents.

Travel industry end-users utilise GDS software to serve their clients. However, there's a disconnect between GDS software developers and the TMC agents trying to get the most out of the technology. GDS text is often filled with jargon and are not designed for traveller consumption.

TMCs are going to have to look after the same number of customers but with less staff – and staff might not know a customer's requirements regarding policy, MIS fields, or approval process. TMCs need to look to their processes to see where they can improve productivity. Whether that's finding ways to effectively communicate with customers to reassure them during these unusual times, or help them with the more vital parts of travel, such as ticketing and visas. With fewer employees dealing with clients, TMCs particularly need to streamline processes to save time and money.

What Products Help Improve Productivity for TMCs?

TMCs rely heavily on GDS software. New technology and automation help improve productivity and streamline how TMCs use GDS software at a time when TMCs need it most.

There are several products designed to help improve productivity for TMC agents. Where GDS software might be obtuse and sometimes difficult to use, there are add-ons available to help TMCs get more from their GDS.

Decoder Suite

✅ **Deciphers incomprehensive GDS data**

✅ **Saves time on finding relevant information**

✅ **Unique documents thanks to custom layouts**

To help TMC agents cut through the technological jargon, **Decoder Suite** instantly extracts and decodes GDS data. Using five decoders – Itinerary, Availability, Timetable, Shopping, and History – this tool is designed to make using your GDS system more efficient and simpler. Each decoder tool captures information from an active window in the GDS, decodes the text, and turns it into a user-friendly document.

The tool presents the information agents need in a consistent and easily digestible format. The density of the data is stripped back, making it much easier to understand while still presenting relevant information from the GDS, saving TMC agents time and effort and helping them to pass vital information on to the traveller or booker in a way that's easy to understand.

Itin to X

✅ **Bespoke templates for your brand**

✅ **Save time with quick itinerary exports**

✅ **Multiple design options for both basic and complex trips**

Itin to X makes it easier for TMC agents to communicate with customers with branded templates available in custom file formats and designs. Individually-designed travel itinerary templates make travel much easier for your customers, while boosting the goodwill of your brand during these tougher times.

Itin to X exports itineraries from your PNR directly into a pdf, word document, email, or .ics format. Looking after the needs of your customers has never been more important, and these custom itineraries empower TMC agents to help them at every turn. They're quick and easy to use and can cater for the most basic or complex of trips.

VisaEase

✅ **Get immediate visa information**

✅ **Automatically determines required visas**

✅ **Removes transit point errors**

Manually checking visa requirements is a lengthy, time-consuming process that smaller teams can do without. **VisaEase** takes over that burden, reviewing visa requirements for travellers and destinations. The application inspects booking files while determining which countries (and transit points) are being travelled to. VisaEase works with CIBT, industry leaders in Visa procurement, to determine the visas required for each trip.

VisaEase is a fantastic application for any TMC looking to bolster productivity. By automatically sorting through all touchdowns and determining the necessary visas, it saves your agents a huge amount of time and hassle.

PNR Watcher

✅ **Rules based quality control at point of sale**

✅ **Assist unfamiliar agents with customer PNR information/ standards**

✅ **Ensure productivity through 'right first time' booking process**

This tool acts as a real-time assistant for TMC staff, providing a valuable helping hand to short-staffed companies. Once you've given **PNR Watcher** a predetermined criterion, the tool prompts consultants to implement your individual clients' needs, route details, company policies, and more. The tool reacts instantly to your agents' GDS entries, reservations, and activities.

PNR Watcher improves productivity by cutting down the amount of time agents have to search for details. For example, entering a profile name can trigger a response containing all pre-specified details relating to it. It's a TMC's own personal multi-tasking assistant, providing prompts and reminders to agents.

CheckMate

✅ **Constantly searches for class and seating availability**

✅ **Saves time and money on seating**

✅ **Works independently, allowing you to focus elsewhere**

Flight availability can be tricky to handle, especially for a smaller TMC. Seats can vanish as fast as they appear. Once business travel is back to its fullest capacity, diminished TMC teams will need to be able to work at a quicker, more efficient pace to capitalise and ensure good-quality travel for their customers, and the best use of any net or corporate fares.

Our **CheckMate** tool keeps a watchful eye on both class and seating availability, helping you get customers into their preferred seats at the best possible fare.

CheckMate features a desktop interface that interacts with the current booking file, automatically picking up on Waitlisted flights or enabling users to enter fully closed flights they wish to monitor and selecting from seat characteristics they wish the system to find. With the details saved, CheckMate then searches continuously for availability, emailing when an item has been found.

CheckMate saves TMCs time and transforms the way they handle released inventory. It also helps save clients' money while giving them a tailored trip.
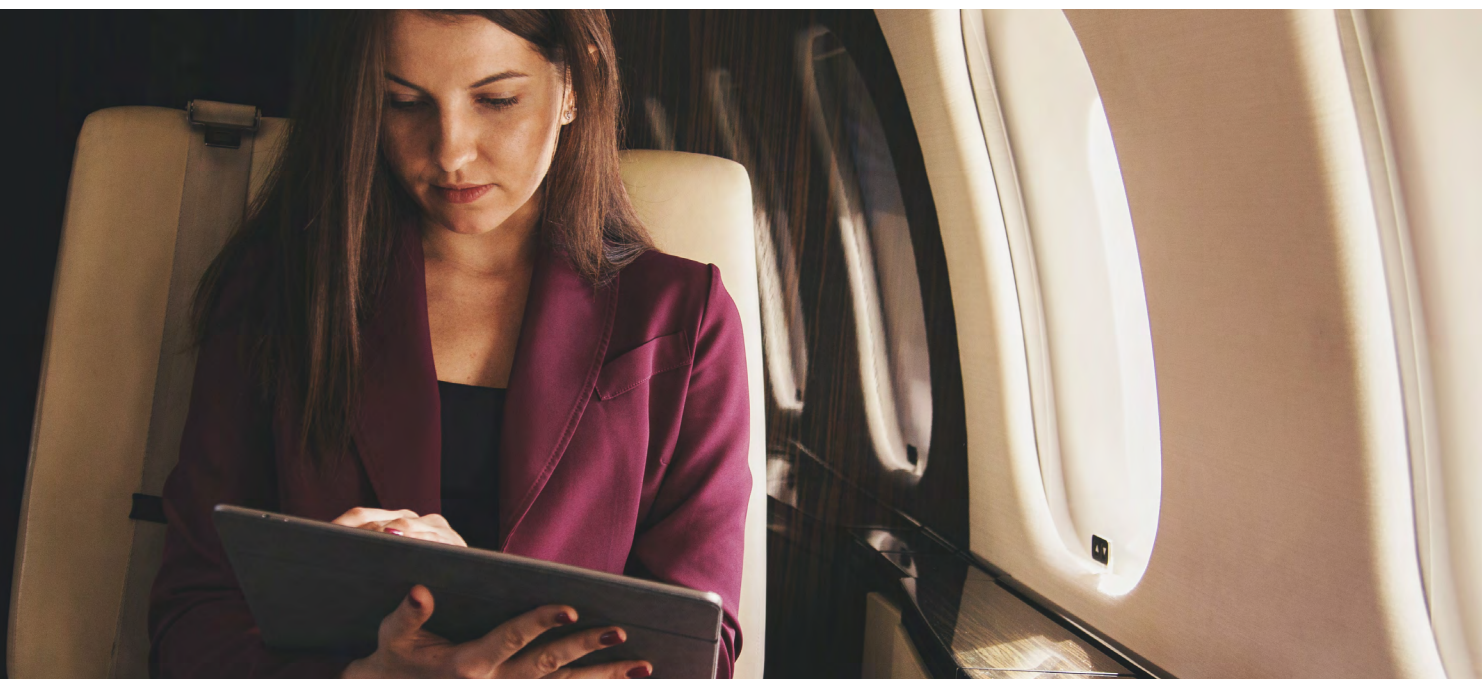
Ticketing Inspector

✅ **Removes manual effort of ensuring all PNRs are properly ticketed**

✅ **Fully automated – problems are highlighted well in advance of trip departure**

✅ **Ensures professionalism and stops any embarrassing mistakes**

Un-ticketed bookings can bring on some of the biggest panics for customers and TMCs. **Ticketing Inspector** runs at designated intervals, checking passenger information and ensuring they're always fully ticketed.

Ticketing Inspector can work whenever you need it to – whether that's scheduled overnight or an adhoc inspection, and if an un-ticketed passenger is detected, an email is sent automatically.

The Ticketing Inspector tool allows for smooth sailing through the travel process for both you and your passengers.

To alleviate the stress from your TMC team, Ticketing Inspector highlights any potential problems far in advance, meaning they can be resolved before a disaster happens. What's best is it requires nearly no input from your agents, meaning they can prioritise other tasks.

NavAgent

Coming soon

NavAgent is a new, upcoming product that is just around the corner. Specifically designed to assist TMCs to be more efficient and productive in a post-COVID world, NavAgent gives you access to unparalleled customer insights.

NavAgent is a collaborative project between Navitas and Agentivity. This new product combines the advanced booking capture and analysis tools of Agentivity with our point-of-sale automation applications and software integration expertise.

Comprised of 5 cutting-edge modules, NavAgent integrates directly with your GDS with no complex setup. The five modules are:

- ✓ **Current PNR activity**
- ✓ **Traveller booking trend and behaviour**
- ✓ **Corporate trends and patterns**
- ✓ **Upcoming and recent bookings**
- ✓ **Unused e-tickets**

NavAgent empowers your TMC to bring together relevant client, booking trend, and ticketing data to deliver personalised experiences for every customer.

How Navitas Helps TMCs in Times of Crisis

TMCs have been decimated by the COVID-19 outbreak, and it's vital that after restructuring is complete, they can operate at full pace once more. Remaining TMC agents will be required to improve their productivity, but they're often held back by GDS systems designed for the masses, rather than the individual needs of a TMC.

Our bespoke software solutions help make you a smarter TMC, while saving time and money during this crucial period. Our plug-ins help your teams to improve their productivity by making GDS systems more decipherable and easier to use.

Throughout the pandemic we have been working with many agencies who have used this time to review their process and look at how workflows can be improved through automation and integration of systems. Often, they find huge benefit in bringing together somewhat disparate systems to give staff a wider view of data available to them. For example, integrating data held about customer MI requirements in the back office to the point of sale through a bespoke Ticketing/QC application can bring massive workflow efficiencies.

TMCs are already facing difficult changes and tough decisions. Our GDS plug-ins focus on making the software more user-friendly and giving TMC agents the help they need during and beyond the COVID-19 crisis.

" *We've been working with the team at Navitas Solutions for more than 15 years. They thoroughly understand our business and are always willing to talk through any challenges we might have with our current parameters, and make any necessary changes quickly and without fuss. What's more, they appreciate that – sometimes – a bespoke approach is what's needed to deliver the results we're looking for. Nothing is ever too much trouble for them.* **"**

Karen Hurst
Business Development Executive, Travel Counsellors

" *The client has always been at the heart of everything Business First Partnership does and Navitas understands the value we place on providing a bespoke service, tailored to our clients' personal travel needs. We've been working in partnership with Navitas for a number of years now. The solutions it offers fully support the expertise of our team and have really enhanced the experience of our clients.* **"**

Marc Jülicher
Technical Director, Business First Partnership

" *If you need something, Navitas is always the first place to go – if they haven't got it, they'll make it for you. If they can't do it; it can't be done. [...] I can't say enough good things about their tools, they're fantastic. When we show a client what the tools allow us to do, that can be the tipping point that gets us the new business.* **"**

Scott Pawley
Managing Director, GTM

Unlock the potential of your GDS with our range of innovative add-ons.

Navitas' smart plug-ins are designed to provide a solution to any travel management issue. From enhancing the useability of your GDS software by stripping back the jargon, to producing bespoke travel itineraries, our add-ons help improve your customer experience.

Discover how each of our products can help improve productivity in your TMC, making life better for both your customers and agents.

Contact us

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