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Ready for Take-Off: How the Covid-19 pandemic reinforced the value of NDC

NDC (New Distribution Capability), a standard developed to evolve the way air products are sold, giving buyers access to a wider range of content, and allowing airlines to bring more differentiated and personalized products to market faster, has— understandably — not been the biggest concern for the travel industry recently.

But as travel resumes, NDC is even more crucial today, as a path to recover and accelerate into better retailing for the travel industry. Taking the lessons

of the Covid-19 pandemic, now is the time to ramp up efforts to better serve travelers and airlines alike.

The pandemic reinforced the need for a strong retail proposition

During the peak of lockdowns, airlines had to manage a barrage of flight cancellations and subsequently needed to issue refunds or vouchers to their passengers for canceled flights. This clearly highlighted that to enable wide-scale adoption of NDC, it would also have to meet travelers' immediate and more complex requirements such as flight changes, cancellations, ancillary services selection, reporting, and notification in case of involuntary changes. At Amadeus, we made inroads into delivering these essential functionalities. The NDC standard has been adapted to meet the need for voucher-based refunds as well as updated to offer extra features, such as information and reassurance about the safety and hygiene measures being taken throughout the journey.

Providing value to the business traveler in a post-pandemic world

When business travel returns, the need for access to richer and more pertinent content will be pronounced. The very genesis of NDC was to bring new levels of flexibility and creativity. Travel decision makers need access to the complete offers and consumer-friendly policies of an increasing number of airlines via NDC. The recently expanded partnership with [Southwest Airlines](#) on the Amadeus Travel Platform along with new NDC content with [American Airlines](#), [Air France-KLM](#), and [Singapore Airlines](#) points to this increasing choice and transparency. In the case of unexpected schedule changes, Amadeus-connected travel advisors can rest assured knowing their customers can be automatically re-booked with instant special service requests and also enjoy real-time frequent flyer validation. Such post-booking servicing capabilities will be crucial in helping bring back traveler confidence.

A critical role in the recovery of the travel industry

NDC helps airlines build targeted offers when a request comes through from aggregators or agents, opening new revenue opportunities for airlines as they begin to customize offers for travelers around requests for additional baggage, food options, Wi-Fi, or any other onboard service.

For travel sellers, a whole new world of opportunities will open up as they have access to new, richer and more innovative tailored content. This means more images, videos, ancillary services, reviews and targeted bundled offers that they can select from and propose to their customers, all while having continual access to the latest promotions, fares and updates.

But the success of NDC will eventually be measured by the level of sustainable adoption not merely by airlines but by all players in the travel ecosystem.

As global air travel recovers, travelers will be more concerned than ever for a smooth end-to-end experience, especially when it comes to last-minute changes to travel plans or flight cancellations. In this sense, the disruption caused by the pandemic has reinforced the need for standardization and collaboration across the travel industry to ensure customers can be helped and assisted effectively through all channels in real time.

As we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, NDC will become an enabler for rapid change.

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