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How Amazon Web Services wants to aid travel brands in recovery

By Jill Menze (/Jill-Menze) | December 16, 2020

Travel and hospitality companies ravaged by the COVID-19 pandemic have one fundamental concern as they attempt to rebuild their businesses: How can you do even more with even less?

“That’s really the stock phrase I’m hearing repeatedly from our customers around the industry,” says David Peller, managing director of travel and hospitality at **Amazon Web Services** (<https://aws.amazon.com/>).

“We’re all trying to save costs in this particular environment. I think COVID is pushing enterprises around the world towards the cloud.”

To assist travel and hospitality brands in their digital transformations, AWS has launched a new partner program designed to help companies reduce their IT costs, innovate quickly and position themselves to not only survive this tough period but also thrive in the long run.

Called AWS Travel and Hospitality Competency, the program identifies and promotes the most experienced AWS partners that can provide technology and services to help improve operational efficiency and the guest-facing experience.

“These are companies with proven expertise with cloud services, with AWS in particular and with industry expertise,” Peller says.

Cloud commitment

AWS says the Competency Program is “one of the toughest designations an AWS Partner can achieve and maintain,” giving customers confidence in the partners they choose to work with.

The program launched in early December with 27 partners, including consulting partners **Accenture** (<https://www.accenture.com/us-en>) and **Deloitte** (<https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en.html>) and technology partners **OpenJaw Technologies** (<https://www.openjawtech.com/>), **Datalex** (<https://www.datalex.com/>), **IBS Software** (<https://www.ibsplc.com/>), **3Victors** (<https://www.3victors.com/>), **Boxever** (<https://www.boxever.com/>) and **Volara** (<https://volara.io/home-page>).

According to Volara co-founder and CEO Dave Berger, the provider of voice-based hospitality solutions - named one of PhocusWire’s **Hot 25 Startups for 2021** (<https://www.phocuswire.com/Volara-Hot-25-travel-startups-2021>) - became involved in the program after AWS received positive feedback from Volara’s clients and inquired to learn more.

“After spending a few weeks ‘under the ‘hood’ of our software and multiple interviews of our CTO, the team at AWS invited us to be an inaugural partner,” Berger says.



COVID is pushing enterprises around the world towards the cloud.

David Peller - AWS

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“As hospitality and travel companies seek solutions that will aid their businesses over the coming years, they'll be doing so with less resources for diligence and less room for mistakes. AWS' stamp of approval is one way that hospitality and travel companies can know that a solution is of the highest quality and has proven business impact.”

Peller says one of the most attractive elements of cloud solutions is “this idea of elasticity.”

“Whether you're a hotel operator or in accommodation and lodging services, whether you're in the restaurant business or the airline and airport business or the technology companies serving those - we're seeing that there is a very strong focus on the needs of digital transformation.

“The two core drivers that we saw pre-pandemic remain ... which is this focus on enhancing the traveler experience, by more personalized experiences and better use of information to deliver compelling experiences. And secondly, driving more operational efficiency and effectiveness through the organization. Cloud really goes for the heart of that.”

Chris Branagan, chief technology officer of IBS Software, believes that enforced working from home has had a significant impact on travel companies embracing the cloud.

“For many businesses, using cloud services was previously just a question of delivering tech to employees. But the positive organizational impact of cloud collaboration tools, as deployments spiked massively during the pandemic, has prompted a reassessment for many companies. There is more awareness of the potential of cloud services to change how whole organizations can work faster and more collaboratively, and how they work with customers,” he says.

“Every business is unique, with a set of bespoke challenges. An organization's main barrier could be inspiring confidence to travel, cutting operation costs, pivoting from passenger transit to air cargo, finding ways to preserve liquidity or anything in between. But what these disparate goals all have in common is they all require innovation. And the cloud is an ideal platform to identify and assess challenges, using data insight to come up with solutions to business challenges.”

Travel brands “have little choice but to implement significant change,” Berger says. “There is a cost to change, but it's necessary to thrive, even survive, in the post-pandemic world.”

Star Alliance's bet

One group angling to take full advantage of AWS' cloud technology is **Star Alliance** (<https://www.staralliance.com/en/>), the world's largest airline alliance comprising 26 member airlines including Singapore Airlines, United Airlines, Air Canada and Lufthansa.

Alongside Tata Consultancy Services, an AWS Partner Network Premier Consulting Partner, Star Alliance is working to migrate all of its data, platforms and business-critical applications to AWS and close its data centers, which will reduce its infrastructure total cost of ownership by 25%.

Although Star Alliance was working with AWS prior to the pandemic, the organization has "made use of AWS service to really remove a lot of friction from very challenging technical processes, connect disparate systems around the world, provide more transparency for the airlines that operate within the alliance and provide more real-time information for the travelers making use of those services," Peller says.

"When COVID hit, just like for so many other organizations, containing and controlling costs became incredibly important to Star Alliance. They were able to really right-size their infrastructure needs on AWS to the capacity that was being demanded at the time."

In fact, Star Alliance was able to reduce its infrastructure footprint and spend by 30%, scaling down its use of AWS rather than paying for excess on-premises capacity.

With AWS, the company is now able to introduce applications in half the time, leveraging Amazon Elastic Container Service with AWS Fargate to power services that make travel easier and safer for passengers.

AWS' technology has enabled Star Alliance to create a baggage tracking application that uses Amazon Aurora to process data from multiple airline baggage systems, as well as its Star Alliance Inter Airline Through Check-In Hub application, which processes and analyzes more than 12 million transactions per month during peak periods.

As airline members and travelers prepare for future travel plans, Star Alliance will "be able to do so much more effectively and efficiently moving forward," Peller says, noting that one service he's particularly excited about is a new connection service that provides travelers with real-time information about the state of their connection and how to navigate the airport.

"We decided to go all-in on AWS to gain the reliability and scalability we needed to support the increasing number of global travelers joining the alliance each year, but the pandemic also proved how valuable it is to have a flexible and agile infrastructure in the cloud. No one could have predicted what has happened so far in 2020, but because of our collaboration with AWS, we were able to quickly adjust our goals and scale back our expenses," says Jeremy Drury, head of digital and technology at Star Alliance.

"In addition to cost savings and elasticity, AWS gives us the most comprehensive set of cloud services to innovate rapidly, introduce new services to keep travelers safe, and continuously reinvent the global travel experience."

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