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# Sustainability must be a priority for business travel in 2021

By Avi Meir - TravelPerk (<https://www.travelperk.com/>) | March 2, 2021

We sit at a critical juncture for the future of business travel.

The changes to the way we work and think about duty of care as a result of the pandemic mean the business travel landscape will look very different at the end of this year compared to the start of 2020.

There can be no doubt though that business travel must resume in order for economies to recover, and I have been saying for some time that the travel industry will boom in the second half of 2021.

As the number of people who have received the vaccine increases and conversations progress about how vaccine passports can become a part of the roadmap to reopen international travel, this is beginning to look more of a reality than a hope.

However, we need to make sure that the momentum behind sustainable business travel in 2020 does not stall in 2021.

Before the outbreak of the pandemic, sustainability was a hot topic, as industry players realized we should and could be doing more to bring the environmental impact of business travel down.

COVID-19 has presented an opportunity for a lot of companies to review their travel policies and guidelines to prepare for the reopening of travel later this year, and we need to encourage these companies to make sure sustainability becomes a central guiding principle.

## Business travel is here to stay

Any suggestion that because travel volumes are down right now means we don't need to worry about making existing travel more sustainable would be misguided.

Some more transactional interactions will continue to be conducted post-pandemic over Zoom or phone.

But what the last year has taught us is that we need in-person interactions to build trust, relationships and rapport in the lead-up to these moments.

And we're likely to see additional new business travel needs arise in the future - for example, the increase in remote working means we will see more internal travel for companies that have moved to a distributed set up.

Although this happens less frequently, these trips will be longer and present a new opportunity for the industry.

Aside from this, there are clear economic benefits for countries from business travel.

In light of the pandemic a Harvard study looked at what **would happen if business travel stopped** (<https://growthlab.cid.harvard.edu/academic-research/business-travel>) completely. The study identifies that business travel causes a diffusion of knowhow that can impact national economic progress, causing economic growth.

When placed alongside the reality of Zoom fatigue and networking FOMO among workforces, this paints a clear picture of the continuing value of a thriving business travel sector.

Seemingly set for a confident recovery in 2021, the question lies in what form it will take.

## The environment is a priority

As we enter the last 10 years before our deadline to meet the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), reducing our impact on the environment has become an urgent priority.

Through the **Paris Agreement (<https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement>)**, European countries have until 2030 to reduce emissions by 55%. This has sharpened minds on how the portion of a company's emissions which result from business travel - and carbon intensive air travel in particular - can be reduced.

Driving awareness in companies and employees has therefore never been so important. Of course, sustainability isn't just limited to emissions figures, but also the sustaining of mental wellbeing and healthy lives - indeed, the third SDG relates to exactly this. During the pandemic, **promoting mental wellbeing and ingraining it in a company's culture (<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/topics/sustainabledevelopmentgoals>)** has taken on more importance.

At TravelPerk, we have done this through our internal community, adding financial support to employees' salaries and maintaining a strong and supportive culture with remote team activities.

We also encourage all our employees, from senior exec to new joiners, to maintain a healthy work-life balance, not least to avoid the ever present risk of burnout.

## Let's do this the smart way

So if you're thinking about how you can take some smart, practical steps to mitigate, reduce and offset your business travel environmental impact, where should you start?

There are a few simple tips I would recommend.

The first is to get the buy in from your team. **74% of employees have no idea what their team's carbon reduction targets are (<https://www.reutersevents.com/sustainability/if-companies-want-meet-climate-targets-they-must-take-employees-journey>)**.

It is time for companies to start involving employees in the decision-making process and drive behavioral change from the bottom up.

Creating a sustainable travel policy is a good place to start. Businesses should incorporate sustainable, green practices and consider creating an incentive program to reward and celebrate the most carbon-conscious travelers.

There is also more that business travel providers could be doing to help. Broadening inventories and giving the option to choose more efficient airlines and low seating classes can significantly reduce emissions.

Transparency is important here: many executives would be happy to make travel choices on this basis but at present aren't always being provided with this information by their providers.

Another step - which we're seeing happen more and more - is replacing short flights with rail journeys. This is another example of an area where both providers and customers have a role to play.

We also offer a **carbon offsetting program, GreenPerk (<https://www.phocuswire.com/travelperk-greenperk-carbon-offset-option>)**, which lets companies offset 100% of their carbon emissions (CO2) generated during business travel automatically on a trip-by-trip basis. Incentives like these can be a smart way to encourage travelers and businesses to be more sustainable with their travel options.

The pandemic has presented the perfect time for businesses to take stock of their travel policies and prioritize sustainability ahead of the reopening of business travel in 2021.

Through developing sustainable travel policies, driving awareness and getting the buy-in from employees, there is a great opportunity to empower more sustainable travel choices and ensure we can move towards more environmentally conscious travel.

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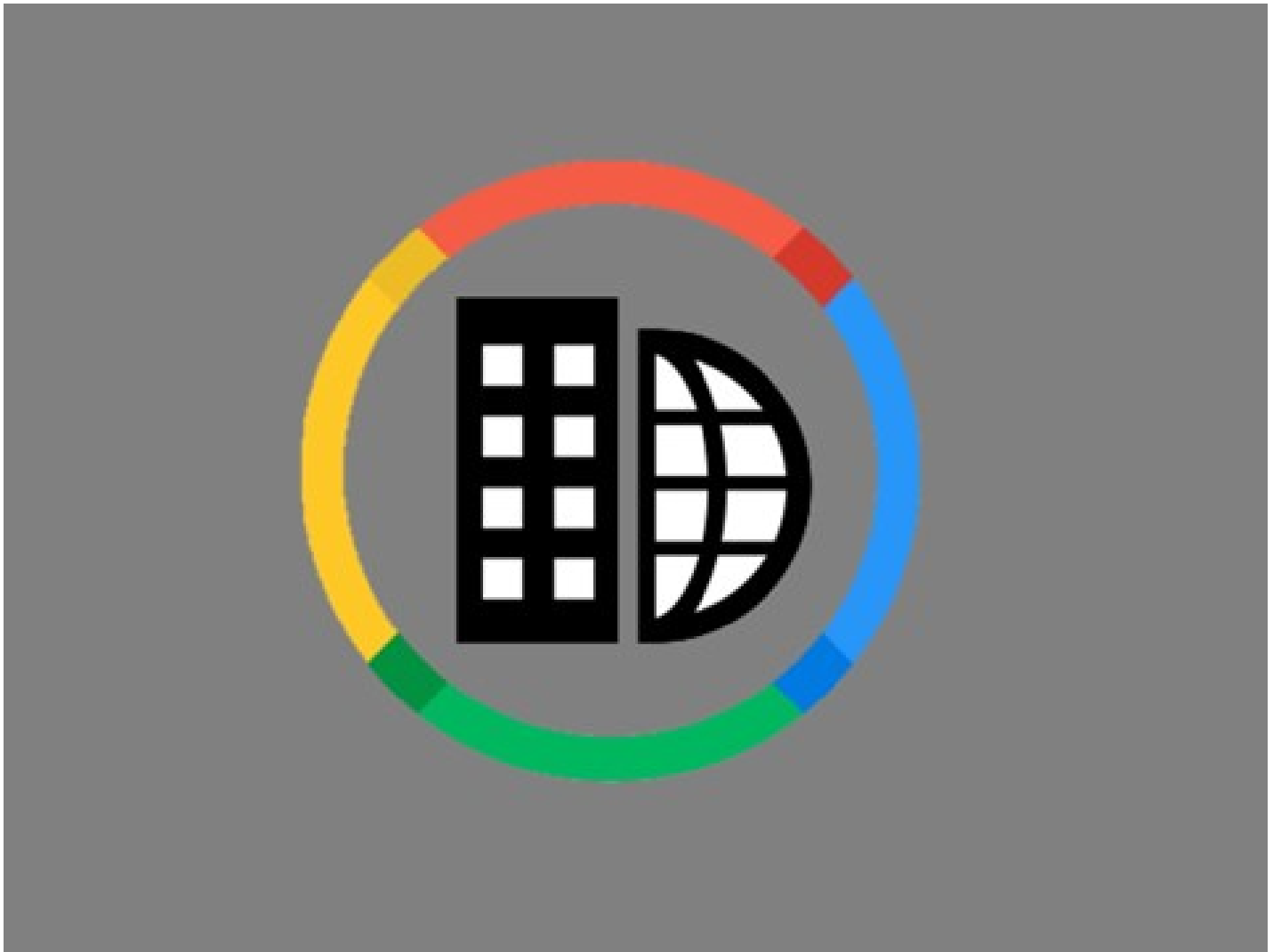
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