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Passengers with Reduced Mobility: security screening guidance

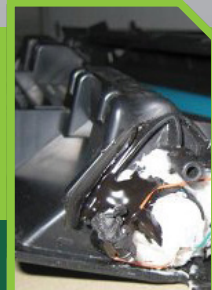
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PANDEMIC BLUES:

KEEPING OUR EYES ON THE TARGET

by Philip Baum

The year 2020 has been defined by the coronavirus pandemic. Sadly, even if a vaccine emerges in the next few months, in all likelihood 2021 will also be blighted by COVID-19. This will either be – and this would be the best-case scenario – just down to the economic impact of damage caused to the industry to date, or, and arguably more realistically, if the virus cannot be suppressed to the point where normal air transport operations can resume, as a result of a worsening situation with an ongoing decline in demand for seats.

Much has been written about how we can make aviation safe and many claims have been made regarding innovative measures introduced by airlines and airports to better protect passengers and staff alike. Yet, whether or not we start to see a global decline in infection rates, there are some serious security challenges resulting from the pandemic that we have to address.

These are six areas that concern me the most:

1. Mental Ill Health & Passenger Angst

We will be reading academic papers and the results of medical research relating to the 2020 pandemic for many years, if not decades, to come. The negative toll on the mental health of swathes of mankind is going to influence every aspect of our lives. Social distancing, long periods of isolation, ill health (COVID, long-COVID or non-COVID related), loss of income, changes in family dynamics, excessive online activity and loss of traditional cultural stimuli

derived from the arts are just a few factors, which will impact employee performance as and when they return to the workplace. Passengers, a significant percentage of whom already have a latent fear of flying, will

be returning to the skies, but to a different flying experience where, for now, they are perceived by crew and fellow passengers as being potential virus transmitters. Add to that the new set of rules we are required to follow, such as mask wearing, early arrival at airports and following defined routes through terminals, and one can understand why, for some people, flying may be a necessity but may also cause additional angst; this, in turn, will impact passenger behaviour.

2. Insider Threats

In many parts of the world, the number of people employed by the aviation industry, and in services peripheral to it, has declined dramatically. Many long-standing employees have been laid off or put on government-backed furlough schemes. It is usually standard practice for employers to recover ID cards and keys and to change passwords to computer networks when staff leave. However, the sheer number of people being made redundant has made standard practice difficult to perform. It is also not deemed a necessity for furloughed staff, who may be earning a fraction of their already minimum wage salaries with the same rent and bills to pay. Meanwhile, with many of those losing their jobs feeling resentful towards their former employers or those maintaining their roles earning less as a result of furlough schemes or lack of overtime opportunities, we can see the potential for insider criminal activity to flourish. Financial gain is, after all, the prime motivating factor for insider crime.

3. Stand-off Detection & Masks

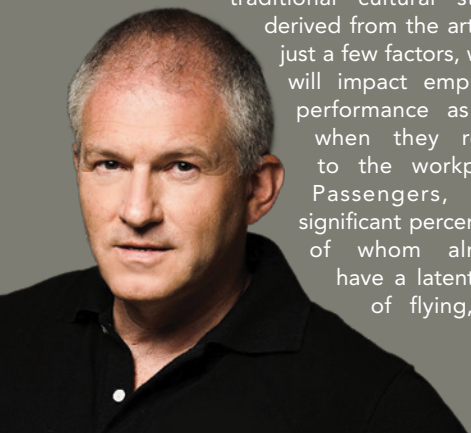
One would hope that the way in which we screen passengers will be at least as robust post-pandemic as it was pre-pandemic. Yet already we can see calls for a more hands-off approach to screening operations – and for very understandable reasons. Clearly screeners will be concerned about close contact with passengers, especially when they are, as we hope, once again streaming through the checkpoints. Yet

“...excessive online activity and loss of traditional cultural stimuli derived from the arts are just a few factors, which will impact employee performance as and when they return to the workplace...”

the checkpoint has its limitations. Sure, we can resolve alarms, but for years we have been arguing that communication with passengers is advantageous from a screening perspective, especially if we are aiming to detect a host of criminal activities that do not involve infiltrating explosive devices onto aircraft. And then there are the masks – and remember some states have tried to limit certain religious groups from covering their faces citing security reasons – which not only negatively impact our ability to utilise facial recognition biometric systems, but also make the detection of expressions of stress far more difficult, whilst also providing an additional cause for beads of sweat to appear on a passenger's forehead.

4. Radicalisation

For months now, there has been little mainstream news coverage of many issues which would, and should, normally be taking centre stage. US election and the scant attention being paid to Brexit deliberations and climate change aside, it's all about coronavirus. Meanwhile poverty, famine and civil wars rage and, for many, the sense of injustice flourishes. In the developed world, youths and young adults find themselves increasingly alienated, as the job market diminishes and society becomes more insular. Hidden away from sight at home, the online world can tempt the more vulnerable members of society to embrace extremist ideologies. With an absence of crowded places and few aircraft taking to the skies, patience is the game. The security services have already made it known that they are concerned about the increased chatter indicating the potential of attacks just as soon as the



"...many of those losing their jobs feeling resentful towards their former employers or those maintaining their roles earning less as a result of furlough schemes or lack of overtime opportunities..."

economy starts to regain its feet. With the aviation industry already suffering, just because the media narrative is all about health, we simply cannot afford to be complacent about security.

5. Finance

We cannot afford to be complacent, but equally we cannot necessarily afford the high cost of security countermeasures. We normally turn to government, but so will everybody else. From social services to the arts, the education sector to the charities we have come to rely on, budgets are being slashed as governments bail out those companies they can and support employees in an unprecedented manner. We see constant cries for additional injections of finance to help industries such as hospitality and

transportation survive the crisis, but the money has to come from somewhere. Long-term that might mean increased taxation, be it on income, inheritance or capital gains, but in the short-term we are going to have to make some really tough decisions as to whether we tolerate increased exposure to risk. Security directors are going to be forced to make do with less when they already needed more. Achieving the right balance will depend upon ensuring that security departments ensure that their financiers are kept fully abreast of the security threats we continue to face.

6. Training

Security often comes well down the pecking order for additional investment when times are hard. Yet training, and especially security training, can be relegated to the bottom of the list. Training not only maintains established skillsets, but it also serves to identify potential insider disharmony (especially in classroom courses) and enables us to keep our focus on the target. Many courses will be coronavirus-related, but the virus is a health problem and not, in itself, a security threat. If the training becomes fixated on preventing virus transmission

"...security directors are going to be forced to make do with less when they already needed more..."

then screener focus will also drift towards identifying those passengers and staff who may be showing signs of infection rather than those with negative intent. With passengers masked, and social distancing the norm, and in the knowledge that there are greater numbers of radicalised individuals accessing our airports, we have to find a way to up our game.




Overall, we can – and must – remain positive. In 2021, it is highly likely a vaccine will be discovered. Innovative technologies are emerging to assist our endeavours. There is an incredible amount of goodwill and understanding that can be leveraged in the workplace. The post-pandemic opportunities will be both exciting and lucrative. Aviation will serve as a remedy to many of the woes we may be experiencing. We just need to avoid applying plasters that might stem the financial bleed of 2020 without addressing security cancers which, if left unaddressed, could be terminal...and not the airport kind! ■

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