

# 10 tech trends set to transform travel in 2022

According to FCM general manager Bonnie Smith, as business travel recovers, more and more companies are embracing technology to help them get back on the road with confidence. This includes easy access to information, instant alerts and travel updates, always-on communication channels, and AI-enhanced booking platforms.



Bonnie Smith, general manager, FCM

According to Smith, the following technology trends will transform travel bookings, the traveller journey, as well as productivity in 2022 and beyond.

## 1. The exchange and sharing of information

Access to accurate, up-to-the minute information has never been more important. Smith says the travel management booking platforms need to provide updated information on both destination and origin information around Covid testing, quarantine regulations or specific travel documents for entry.

“Booking platforms, like the FCM hub, need to make it easy for travel bookers and travellers to access the latest information,” says Smith. “We need to move away from having to trawl the internet for the latest restrictions and regulations – and introduce increased productivity for the entire travel management team.”

## 2. Real-time traveller tracking

Duty of care will remain top of mind in 2022. So much so that you can expect significant advancements in real-time traveller tracking, including integrated risk management tools and customised safety dashboards which allow bookers to see where all their travellers are in an instant – and coordinate their return should the need arise.

## 3. Touchless tech and contactless check-in

Thanks to Covid-19, many of the latest tech advancements are around contactless check-in (airlines and hotels), contactless checkout and contactless payments. Not only does it eliminate unwanted contact and frustrating queues, but it's also quick and easy – a big tick in terms of productivity.

## 4. Biometrics

In the same vein, we can expect biometrics like fingerprint recognition, facial recognition and retina scanning to be introduced in airports to facilitate the flow of passengers. In fact, technology developed by SITA (the ‘SITA Smart Path’) allows the passenger to use their face as a boarding pass, minimising the need for contact as the passenger makes their way through the airport.

In another example, New Zealand is already making use of ‘eGates’ at Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Queenstown airports that use biometrics to match the picture of your face in an ePassport with the picture it takes of you at the gate.

## 5. Chatbots and 24-hour support

Travel apps have come a long way and, according to Smith, the best apps now combine proactive alerts, with conversational chatbots (i.e., fluid and easy to interact with) and 24-hour human support.

“Ultimately, a travel app needs to be an indispensable tool for those on the road. This means instant alerts if flight times, boarding gates and even baggage collection details change. The ability to confirm information through a handy chatbot – and the ability to be connected to a human being, any time of day or night, should you want to talk to a consultant,” says Smith.

## 6. Group chats, collaboration and virtual meetings

There’s little doubt that Zoom (and Teams) has changed the way we work forever. The uptake and adoption of virtual platforms over lockdown was unprecedented. It’s now easier than ever to keep productive on the road – or to tag on a few days of bleisure to any trip without being out of the loop or falling behind. Explore virtual meeting platforms, group chats, file sharing, note taking, document collaboration and more.

In fact, Smith believes that as business travel recovers, many organisations will be more intentional about their trips. In other words, focusing on longer trips that will deliver the most value and reward – while leaving others to videoconferencing. Because where there’s Wi-Fi, there’s a way...



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## 7. Tracking, reconciliation and real-time reporting

In terms of productivity, travel bookers are actively looking for tech solutions that save them both time and money. This includes tracking unused tickets and vouchers – and reminding travellers of the credits they have so they can use them before they expire.

Bookers and travellers are also looking for easy-to-use reporting and reconciliation tools so they can pull instant reports, identify savings and manage their budgets.

## 8. Travel approvals

Another potential bottleneck for travel bookers is the approval process. “It’s understandable that companies have added extra layers of approval for their post-Covid trips,” says Smith. “But it can introduce delays. FCM is constantly looking at streamlining the approvals process, including omni-channel approvals and sending approvals straight to a traveller’s cell phone.”

## 9. UX and end-to-end booking platforms

The latest online booking tools (OBTs) use AI-enhanced technology, making them intuitive and hyper personal. For Smith, UX is more important than ever.

“I know ‘UX’ has been a buzzword in the industry for a while, but the latest tech is game changing. Not only does new AI technology add to the user experience by making quick recommendations based on your booking history, but new plug-and-play tech means we can create a universal FCM booking experience no matter where your offices are in the world.

“Whether you’re booking travel from Asia or South Africa, using Concur or Cytric, your entire team can do the same things, access a wide range of travel content and information, and work in the same way,” says Smith. “This is vital for multinationals with global travel programmes.”

## 10. A renewed focus on traveller satisfaction

It sounds simple, but a happy traveller is a productive traveller. The days of treating travellers (and their trips) as a line item on an expense report are long over. Travel bookers need to ask themselves whether red-eye flights or tight connections are really worth it. By building in breathing room, bookers can reduce traveller stress – and maximise productivity. Small tips include booking lounge access for long layovers, organising early check-in and late check-out at hotels, looking at door-to-door shuttles and, of course, prioritising strong connectivity and free Wi-Fi for travellers on the go. But importantly, you need to track traveller satisfaction. Again tech can help. Always send out a traveller survey post trip – and create dashboards so you can measure and track traveller satisfaction, implementing changes where necessary.

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