



## **‘Airport 2025 – Rethinking the Passenger Experience’**

### **Interview with Rohit Talwar – CEO Fast Future Research**

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*Fast Future Research is conducting the global Airport 2025 study for Amadeus. In this interview for the 2012 Hamburg Aviation Conference, Rohit Talwar, CEO of Fast Future comments on the emerging findings of the research.*

#### **Fast Future - what does that mean?**

We are a research and consulting firm that specialises in providing clients with *fast* insights into the factors and forces shaping the *future*. We use a range of techniques such as horizon scanning, trend analysis and scenario planning to help clients explore the future and respond in innovative ways to the emerging opportunities and challenges.

#### **Should companies not focus on the here and now, and generating revenues and reducing cost to ensure they can survive in the tough competition?**

The current economic crisis was caused by too little long term thinking – not too much. If we only focus on the short term, we miss the bigger picture and may ignore the signals of change that may provide early indications of future risks and opportunities. Big decisions like building a terminal, buying an aircraft, redesigning the current airport or changing our revenue models all require longer term thinking. This needs to be shaped by insights into the future factors that could shape tomorrow’s operating environment.

#### **What do you think are the main challenges that travel companies face?**

The industry faces a perfect storm - with traditionally low operating margins and economic uncertainty at the epicentre. Traveller expectations are changing the world over. Evolving economies are experiencing growth that is leading to a sharp rise in travellers with differing needs and expectations. Around the world, society is also ageing – creating wealthy new customer groups – again with different expectations. Rising fuel prices, climate change, environmental concerns, rapid technological change and the emergence of social media as a communications and marketing channel are all increasing the level of complexity and challenge for the travel sector. At the same time, industry innovators are creating turbulence for their competitors by experimenting with new revenue models such as aggregated buying discounts, auctions and payments for personalisation.

Hence, in the face of all these complex drivers of change, the key challenges for most travel companies are to develop agility, tolerance of uncertainty and a truly innovative and experimental mindset. Industry players have to become adept at scanning the horizon for impending change and 'seeing round corners' to anticipate shocks and opportunities. This future proofing mindset must be accompanied by a willingness to innovate and develop a continuous stream of new revenue models in the expectation that they will change regularly and rapidly in the decade ahead.

### **In what respect can customer orientation help companies?**

In the new economy that is emerging, customers have a lot more power. They can reward or punish you through their comments in the social media. Customers are also demanding far higher levels of service – they have more choice and see many examples of exceptional service – they increasingly expect this from all their suppliers.

The closer we get to customers and the more trust we build, the better the relationship we can develop and the greater the likelihood of them trusting us with critical information about their needs and expectations. The more highly they rate the service provided, the more likely the customer is to provide both positive and negative feedback that can help drive continuous improvement.

### **San Francisco airport has just announced to open a yoga room at the airport, following a suggestion from customers. Is that where airports will be able to make the difference?**

Bigger airports are becoming more like small cities – offering all of the amenities that a city can offer. Passengers want their entire journey to be an enjoyable experience – hence the growing demand for leisure services such as spa facilities, cinemas relaxation rooms, comfortable seating and yoga rooms. Passengers may not choose an airport purely based on leisure facilities, but they may well choose to spend more time at the airport prior to departure if there is an excellent array of leisure options. Passengers may also choose which airport to transit through based on the options for how they spend their stopover time.

### **Do you think that travel partners are well equipped to meet future challenges?**

I think there are some firms that are well equipped managerially, financially and operationally to deliver exceptional service, respond to emerging trends, continue to exceed expectations and delight their customers. There are others who are clearly struggling to innovate and evolve and many will simply fade from the scene in the next decade.

A key future test will be the ability to cope with chaos and complexity – made worse by a massive array of choice, the diversity of computer systems involved and the avalanche of data being thrown off by a wide range of applications across the travel value chain. Hence, collaboration will be a core competence as diverse providers are forced to work together and share data in order to enhance the passenger experience. Customers are increasingly demanding an integrated information flow. So, the imperative is for agents, airlines, airports and travel retailers to share information and consolidate what they provide to the customer – rather than all bombarding the passenger with communications and offers.

**What is your recommendation to travel partners to tackle as the highest priority?**

Travel partners must develop a tolerance uncertainty and prepare for a range of different possible future scenarios. They must build a management that is truly innovative, forward thinking and willing to act fast to respond to emerging opportunities and threats. To survive and thrive in the decade of turbulence ahead, we must create organisations that have good anticipatory skills, flexibility and an unwavering commitment to exceptional customer service.

Rohit Talwar is a global futurist and award winning speaker who focuses on the future of the aviation, travel, tourism and leisure sectors. He leads Fast Future Research providing advice to industry leaders around the world on the ideas, trends and forces that could shape future strategies and business models. He is currently running a major study on the Future Airport Passenger Experience with Amadeus. Rohit has worked and spoken in over 50 countries on six continents. His clients include 3M, Aeroports de Paris, Amadeus, Blackberry, EADS, Intel, Microsoft, Mumbai Airport, Nokia, Panasonic, Sabre, SAP, Schiphol Airport, Siemens Airport Services, Tata, Travelport and a range of government and city agencies around the world.

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