

Health Security in Hospitality

The IOH hosted a webinar on 28th July 2020 to explore the requirement for higher levels of health protection and security in the hospitality sector. The expert panellists were able to offer insight from various perspectives and comprised:

Peter Collins *Global Security Director, Collinson (Travel Risk Management Specialists)*
Jackie Galea *Director of Sales & Marketing at Archer Hotels*
Sandy Moring *Director, Strategic Travel Solutions*
Brian Moore *Operations Director, Global Secure Accreditation Ltd (Security Accreditation)*

The global Covid-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on the hospitality industry and on traveller confidence generally. However, the industry is fighting back and reappraising how to deliver safe hospitality services in the Covid-19 era.

Hotels, restaurants, and other hospitality providers are now focusing on how best to rebuild the confidence that will be needed to return to pre-Covid 19 revenues. It is clear that travellers and those with obligations for the security, safety and wellbeing of travellers are seeking greater clarity about health security standards and greater assurance that these standards are being met.

Opening up after Covid-19 – What are the Challenges?

Delivering health security is dependent on a number, of things:

- *Understanding the threat*
- *Accessing legitimate expertise*
- *Being conversant with evidence-based preventative strategies and tactics*
- *Designing, testing, and implementing standard operating procedures (SOP's) to deliver the strategy and tactics*
- *Learning from experience, and that of others, and refining procedures*
- *Training staff and testing performance*
- *Leading and managing the health security operation with commitment and diligence so that it becomes part and parcel of a good service operation*

There are many parallels between physical security and health security, and the disciplines are very similar. At a tactical level, the activities are different because the intruder in the case of Covid-19 is invisible but potentially lethal. Therefore, new ways of thinking will be required.

Travellers expect hotels to be clean but now they expect them to be as near to sterile as can be reasonably achieved to reduce the risk of transmission. Whilst a completely sterile environment is not achievable in this context (no more than it is in a hospital) there is an expectation of 'medical' levels of cleanliness.

Therefore, communications will have to evolve quickly to reflect a new reality and words like 'clean' may give rise to terms like 'disinfected', 'sanitised', 'hygienic', 'intensively cleaned' or 'Covid-19 Safe', etc.

Already socially distanced service models have been adopted in hospitality and learning is accumulating. In May 2020 a team from the University of Surrey spoke to 19 different hotel HR experts to identify the key trends and major challenges that will emerge in the next 10 years and robotic or automated interaction with guests is predicted to rise and this could help facilitate more socially distanced models of operation to enable a safer and faster reopening and recovery of some hotels

There remains great caution in the market about the resumption of business travel and it is currently being considered on an exceptional / business critical basis. Some estimates suggest it is only occurring at around 10% of pre-Covid 19 levels. Even the most optimistic of corporate buyers are suggesting a September/October 2020 limited resumption of limited travel for the corporate travellers, at the earliest. Leisure travellers are showing greater eagerness to travel, and that market is opening up, but national government 'second-wave' interventions may impact that channel. Meetings' and Events' resumption is likely to be slower; perhaps the second half of 2021. There is interest in exploring hybrid events to accommodate a mix of a maximum of 30 people (UK Govt current guidance) along with virtual participation.

The biggest challenge that hotels, restaurants and other hospitality providers face is demand. With travel restrictions, a resurgence of cases throughout Europe and heightened concern for safety, people are not travelling. Many companies have enacted business travel bans or discouraged travel, which typically sustains hotels from Sunday through Thursday. Combined with US travel restrictions and global concern over US Covid cases, the international traveller segment has all but disappeared. This has been mitigated only slightly by some pent-up leisure demand coming through. Consequently, the focus on building trust and confidence in health protection and security is the key area of focus.

The need for a multi-disciplinary approach

Recognising the links between health, hygiene and security is key and the main link is safety. Travellers used to 'assume' their safety, but the sheer number of worrying events happening around the world brought to us nearly instantly and constantly through media apps, hyper connectivity, and social media has challenged that assumption. Each discipline: health, hygiene and security has started from a different knowledge base, with more or fewer standards, some areas regulated and some not.

When each discipline is 'dissected', there are common bases – understanding the risks and threats, implementing evidence-based good practice and applying it through rigorous SOPs, training and educating people to understand why they should do certain things and not do others, mean it is possible to 'link' health, hygiene and security around a common 'safety' framework. One example of where these things come together is the concept of a 'security perimeter' – everyone has been to airports where everything and everyone is screened before being allowed 'airside'. The GSA Covid-19 Certificate of International Good Practice has applied this 'security perimeter' principle to health security. Anything that the disease could be carried in or on has to be screened or cleaned. Just thinking that way starts to bring the medical, health & safety, hygiene, and security disciplines together. What may be different now is the longer health security 'tail'. What is meant by that is, whereas security concerns used to end when you got home and (apart from a bit of worry that your credit card may have unauthorised expenditure on it) that was it. Now, there is the additional concern about did you pick up the virus, should you self-isolate, and the possible effects on family and colleagues. The common answer to all of this is effective travel management for the Covid-19 era.

Hotels in general have largely always understood and delivered on cleanliness and guest safety. One of the things that has changed is the documentation of these standards and hotels' ability to provide evidence that these standards have been implemented and maintained. The industry will need to be more transparent about the things it is doing to build the required confidence. For example, high touchpoints like elevator buttons and door handles are being cleaned even more regularly and it is being supervised and documented. There are certainly additional tools and precautions that are new

to our industry —like the use of foggers and electrostatic sprayers to help sanitize both guest rooms and public spaces. The way we interact with guests has been carefully reconsidered — from social distancing and signage, to the use of PPE and hand sanitizers throughout the hotel or restaurant. Some aspects of service will look a little different. For example, some hotels have temporarily suspended daily housekeeping services. This protects both guests and staff. Some hotels have found guests do not want staff in their rooms daily. They simply call or text when they need amenities or services. The key challenge now is for us all to find ways to deliver the same level of service, with less interaction!

Customer Trust - Does it Matter?

In May 2020 a PWC ‘traveller sentiment’ survey, in relation to whom they found to be the leading authority on what defines safety when it comes to traveling in the context of COVID-19, placed levels of traveller trust in private companies at approximately 10% and this includes establishments such as hotels and restaurants as well as airlines. This compares with 59% for institution such as Centre for Disease Control (CDC), 49% for state level government, 37% for hospitals and other health organisations and 36% for Federal Government. The public are naturally going to be sceptical about whether commercial pressures force private companies to compromise to much. This is why businesses will need to be proactive in bringing forward convincing, credible means of reassuring the travelling public.

Centres for Disease Control (CDC)	59%
State Government	49%
Other health organisations	37%
Federal Government	36%
Local Government	31%
Your Doctor	13%
Private companies (e.g. airlines, hotels, restaurants)	10%

* Source: PWC Traveller Sentiment Survey, May 2020

Similarly, corporates will see it as absolutely critical that they can trust their suppliers as they begin to define the new ‘Covid-19’ paradigm for exercising their duty of care to their business travellers. There is an obvious reputational risk for corporate travel manager and company and possible legal implications if suppliers let them down. Of course, the suppliers themselves have clear moral and legal responsibilities to care for their customers.

Customer trust has always been paramount in the hospitality industry. Now, more than ever, it goes beyond traditional service and security. Both corporate and leisure travellers have a need to feel confident that the protocols being promoted are also followed. And for corporate travel agencies and decision makers, the responsibility is heightened. Hotels understand what is at stake both for their guests and for those who work in the sector every day, and that they are doing everything possible to be able to operate safely together is critical. Perhaps this is why relationships with clients, customers and guests, and the trust that comes from those relationships, matter more than they ever have before.

RFPs

We can expect future corporate RFPs to change as there will definitely be more questions relating to physical and hygiene security. The advent of ISO 31030 next year will create much more emphasis for them to require evidence-based responses - not just a tick box exercise. The days of us all marking our

own homework are drawing to an end. Some of the technology platforms that deliver RFP services are beginning to design these new requirements into the process.

So, what do corporates want to know regarding hotels and restaurants and their approach to safety?

- That they have robust process and procedures in place that align with the latest authoritative medical and scientific advice relevant to their location
- There are appropriate levels of resource to support these procedures
- They have access to and track expert advice and guidance in formulating their policies and procedures and in responding to incidents when necessary
- That the standards and the effective delivery of these standards can be objectively validated

Confidence is essential in any business and is built on reliability, consistency, openness, responsiveness, good communication and not taking anything for granted. One of the panellists described a very recent trip where he stayed at different hotels of similar size/grade in the same area of the UK. He was struck by the differences in the overt hygiene regimes, from PPE worn by staff, the way food was served, and even having to call personal information details 6 feet away from the reception desk with a large number of others present in the reception (not good practice!). He was left feeling concerned about which approaches were correct. This underlines that people want to know that there is a consistent standard and it is being consistently applied.

An Independent Certification Approach

There are a lot of template models in circulation which provide guidance and a check list for hotels, restaurants, and other hospitality providers to ‘self-certify’ that they are Covid-19 safe. However, whilst these approaches may or may not provide guidance which is fully in alignment with the latest medical and scientifically validated best practice – they fall critically short in validating compliance as it remains a ‘mark your own homework model’

We know survey after survey in recent years points to increased levels of concern from travellers about their safety and security and the increasing prioritisation by corporates of the ‘Duty of Care’ towards travellers and their wellbeing.



The new ISO 31030 Travel Risk Management Standard is due for publication in early 2021 and this, for the first time, offers a global benchmark set of standards and comprehensive practice guidance for the travel risk management sector. Self-certification will not be supported by ISO 31030 as it will require organisations generally and travel risk managers specifically to ensure objective and evidence-based assessment undertaken by themselves or competent and qualified 3rd parties.

Marketing hype v substantive proof of safety

The challenge for corporates is to differentiate between marketing hype and substantive assurance of standards and compliance. Corporate travel managers and buyers are already reporting being overwhelmed by the amount of marketing messages that are being sent to them about various protocols to address COVID that have been put in place. In summary:

- There is confusion as to what ‘Minimum Standards’ represent globally – it can vary enormously
- The introduction of ISO 31030 in Q1/2021 will address many of these issues and will require suppliers to operate shift to independent assessment models of assurance
- This will help define where the stake in the ground is to measure what the courts will define as “reasonable actions” when things go wrong.

The market is now beginning to develop independent assurance models utilising experts who are qualified and experienced in security and assessment processes and consistent and transparent standards. GSA is a market leader as it works in partnership with a global qualifications and awarding body approved by UK Government. This body acts an independent oversight of the GSA processes to ensure the integrity and trustworthiness of the accreditation and certification process and it must be independently satisfied of the evidence that standards are being met and maintained.

Independent accreditation or certification is another tool to help the industry to build confidence with its customers. It provides reassurance that the industry stands behind what it says and confidence that the steps promised to keep guests safe are in fact being taken.

To satisfy the standards of a certification of ‘international good practice’ a qualified body which can challenge the assessment has to be independently satisfied that the evidence of compliance warrants certification. This is at the heart of the authority and integrity of the certification. The commitment to good practice means that we collectively have to keep our knowledge updated and refreshed. Independence helps avoid ‘group-think’ and can also tap into expertise from other disciplines.

The certification processes needed to create a methodology to standardise decision-making in a disciplined way across different assessors, different assessments, different businesses, and different countries. This brings reliability and consistency which are two of the ‘fundamentals’ that underpin the trust and confidence of clients. Also, given how serious this virus is, if health issues were to arise, we would be able to demonstrate rigour and due diligence in our approaches.

GSA’s regulator, SFJ Awards, operate globally and have a heritage in the health and security sectors and are themselves UK Government regulated. They have the skill set and mindset to professionally challenge but to do so in a way that adds value to GSA’s assessments and ultimately our clients and their customers safety and protection, you get these benefits from self-certification.

Guest reviews have changed the hospitality industry in a good way. Reviews give travellers insight and confidence. In today's environment, where duty of care is such a key concern, independent certification as another tool to earn that trust from travellers.

Certificated properties have the ongoing support of GSA who will, on their behalf, monitor the evolving response to Covid-19 and provide revised guidance as required, and approved by SFJ Awards.

With so many venues operating their own approach, with no global standard to evaluate against, many corporates will seek an independent, competent external process of measurement that they can trust.

We all suspect that our world is forever changed, and new protocols will become standard questions on RFPS and throughout the buying process. Much like a AAA or Forbes rating, customers will want to know if a hotel's or other property's cleaning standards are among the best. What we are experiencing now is the establishment of a 'new norm'. Once the insurance companies get more involved in having to make changes to policies, potentially premiums and then inevitably pay outs, their appetite for independent accreditation/certification will most like become part of the new norm. This new normal will generate some very good practise that can help individuals and organisations deal with unforeseen events and build resilience. It is not unrealistic to suppose that hotel guests and staff may, in future, be required to scan in their 'Bio Health I.D. card' demonstrating that they have current tamper-proof evidence that they are virus free as a condition of entry. We are, however, some way off that.

Litigation in respect of Covid-19 may reach its peak with one of two outcomes (i) hotels were so far down the causal link-chain as to be irrelevant or (ii) any corporate place where large numbers of strangers congregate, will be subject of class actions for damages. However, where health-security along with counter-terrorism, crime and cyber-crime are part of one security discipline which has recognised international standards in place the hospitality industry will become less vulnerable.

Benefits of Independent Accreditation / Certification

There are considerable benefits in taking this approach. The main issue is to be able to demonstrate authoritatively that the standards being adopted have been validated as based on the latest scientific and medical understanding of Covid-19 and its transmission characteristics and the most effective preventive measures. The second big issue is providing credible assurance that standard is being met all the time.

Addressing the first issue, the right expertise needs to be engaged together – medical, health & safety, security – to rigorously work through available knowledge and good practice and ensure scientific and medical evidence is continually tracked so that any modifications to best practice are made as early as possible. That work needs to be submitted to an independent and qualified validating body. That is what we have done at GSA with our COVID-19 Certificate of International Good Practice. In respect of the second issue, many of the hotels that GSA have been working with all have good high-level documents setting out what they want to achieve in terms of good hygiene and health protection. Some are able to demonstrate that they can do this. Few are able to demonstrate that they are doing this all the time.

The consequences of disease spreading can be fatal, so the bar should be set high. But one does not get too far by fear alone – support and education are more important in helping hospitality businesses

to make smart commercial choices. Our COVID-19 certification is therefore not a one-off; the standards have to be maintained throughout the currency of the Certificate. There are certain contractual requirements and other ways which help us with this, but the main thing is encouraging hard-pressed staff to understand why the standards matter.

So, the benefits extend to providing internal assurance that hospitality businesses are doing the right things to protect their guest and staff; and also, to provide confidence that corporate customers or partners are meeting their duty of care to travellers. The GSA Certification will also mean that those companies who choose GSA hotels or restaurants will be compliant with ISO31030 in respect of the threat from Covid-19 (and from physical security and safety risks also under GSA accreditation).

The certification process has been designed to deliver the best guest experience possible whilst also:

- Demonstrating an effective strategy to stop the virus entering the hotel, restaurant or other venue
- Providing procedures to limit its ability to spread within the location
- Ensuring that the right procedures are in place to respond to an infection risk or alert

The GSA certification is based on an independent, investigative and forensic analysis of risks at the hotel, restaurant or other premises, underpinned by a qualified regulator to ensure its validity and integrity. As a result,, the vast majority of corporates will not need to conduct their own assessment or require the completion of Covid-19 specific questions in RFPs. The high standards of the GSA certification are likely to satisfy the needs of all corporate customers in respect of ISO31030.
