

Darren Blair:

Could we be at the turning point towards a rebounding global recovery?

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This week we saw significant developments on the vaccine front that have implications not just for us personally but for businesses too. News of the vaccine clearly put new momentum into travel and hospitality stocks with some seeing as much as a 40% uplift in a day.

Could this be the turning point towards a rebounding global recovery? Should hospitality and travel businesses start preparing for a return to normalcy in the very near term?

While there is every reason to rejoice and start planning for the future, it is still very hard to predict how quickly any recovery will unfold. The end of the battle against COVID-19 is still months, if not years away. Leisure travel is easier to plan for but businesses will need far more certainty. Even with some clarity by the end of the year, it will be some time before widespread enthusiasm for travel returns.

However, businesses have the here now to deal with. While none of us are ready to prophesize the end of the office or a permanent shift to remote working, much of the world has been working from home for months, and surveys show that there is little appetite to go back any time soon, leave alone start travelling. Many companies have also taken the opportunity to use break points in their leases to say goodbye to their permanent bases in favour of operating virtually or moving to more flexible workspaces.

Working remotely has transformed business practices though, and it did that fast. Whether in the office, on-the-go or at home, we have welcomed technology to help us manage in this time of uncertainty.

Some staff members are gone, others are working remotely and more still continue to be on furlough or on reduced working arrangements. Standard work processes don't work any more, especially with reduced teams and limited access to legacy systems. Paper checks, ACH file generation and a handful of corporate cards used to serve centralized procurement departments fairly well but new work arrangements need new solutions. New joiners are also starting remotely without having had any chance to go to an office and collect their laptops or office supplies. BYOD is the new normal, and new team members will now need to be able to get their office supplies, laptops and work chairs delivered to their homes, and employers have to arrange to pay for them. And then there is the long tail of business spend - marketing campaigns, insurance, tax, membership renewals, amongst others, that don't justify purchase orders and bank payments either. Physical cards that were once passed from desk to desk are not fit for purpose any more. More individuals now need to be able to independently access or request payments for the jobs that need to get done. Giving corporate cards to each employee is not the answer in these uncertain times but on-demand access to payment instruments with the appropriate controls and spend limits is.

Mobile devices can now be leveraged by businesses to enable employees with the ability to spend without having to provide everyone with pre-paid cards, especially when credit is tight. Team managers can be alerted directly on their mobile phones when someone in their team requires access to cash and they can approve or decline those requests based on policy and need. This is not just a simple rendition of a 16-digit primary account number (PAN) for online purchases alone but for in-store, in-app and in-transit usage too.



Dynamic policy controls and rules can now be tailored to each card, individual or specific spend and not just at a program level. When so much is changing so fast, it is essential to have better controls applied before the spend is incurred and not simply at the time when expense reports are filed. These developments are required to support not just the new hybrid work-life environment, but also bring efficiencies to spend management when business travel returns.

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