

# Op-Ed: Entering and exiting ‘the half-way world’ in travel retail



Roger Jackson: Our job is to fundamentally give confidence to passengers

## Travel Retail & Covid-19, By Roger Jackson Managing Director at Organico Solutions (The SEVA Group)

‘The half-way world’.

Like the majority of people who will be reading this, I have worked in travel retail for the last decade, and my business relies on the 4.5 billion people who fly every year. The one word that sends a shudder down all of our spines now is ‘COVID-19’.

Not only because of the monumental impact on global health ([+670k deaths so far](#)) but, also because of the potentially devastating impact it has had on the job and income of millions of people around the world. COVID-19 really has touched us all in some way.

The main question everyone would like to know is “When does this pandemic end?” And for us in travel retail, when will people start to travel in a similar way as before?

Looking at history pandemics typically have one of two types of endings:

1. **MEDICAL:** Historically, a medical ending ensues when incidence and death rates reduce to the point that the virus isn’t relevant to have a significant impact.
2. **SOCIAL:** When a large section of the population becomes tired of the situation and also more importantly learns how to adapt.

The likely ending of this pandemic is probably a mixture of the two factors. Firstly, globally our doctors are starting to understand how to treat patients better. This new targeted treatment process will reduce deaths and hospital admissions\*.

*We need to follow the best-in-class domestic retailers and then go the extra mile to reassure that our environment is not only safe, but that we as a community of brands and retailers are leading the way in the hygiene and safety standards we set*

Then we look at the search for a vaccine or a treatment that will both render the virus relatively useless. Looking at the latest updates, there are +160 different vaccines under development. Whilst this all sounds promising, unfortunately it is not the 'silver bullet' we all want – most vaccines look to be 6-9months away before release\*. And then, of course, we have the challenge of how do you manufacture and pay for 7.8 billion people to receive it? On this basis, most analysts suggest it could be several years before this is all possible.

### **'The half-way world'**

We are already seeing huge resistance to lockdowns and the measures governments have put in place with face masks etc, even leading to demonstrations in the US/Europe. However, the general feeling with most people is that the impact on COVID-19 has been huge in terms of health and financial pressures and we want to get on with our daily lives as soon as possible.



Simple but important instructions upon entry into the departures zone at Heathrow Airport Terminal 5 (Picture taken on July; Martin Moodie)

The key here is for the population to adapt. This is mainly through hygiene, face masks, social distancing and general common sense – and some risk. Just like businesses globally do every day, we have to all take a risk-based approach.

What does this mean for travel retail? We know that as more and more people choose to socially end the pandemic, this will mean a return to air travel for leisure and business. However, we also know that whilst they will return, passengers are likely to behave differently, with 43% of a recent survey suggesting they will avoid duty free stores (\*PI Research).

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My view is that our job is to fundamentally give confidence to passengers! We need to follow the best-in-class

domestic retailers and then go the extra mile to reassure that our environment is not only safe, but that we as a community of brands and retailers are leading the way in the hygiene and safety standards we set. Once this becomes the norm, then we can get back to the business we love of building brands and creating memorable shopping experiences for passengers.



Back in business: World Duty Free at Heathrow Airport Terminal 5 offers clear, safe wayfinding to help boost consumer confidence [Pictures: Martin Moodie, 27 July]



So, far, our business is implementing Gift with Purchase with antibacterial properties, and QR codes that can deliver virtual Brand Ambassadors and product knowledge. All of these things are great, but the basics of ready-to-go packs (pre-merchandised/sanitised) and a clear pricing strategy on well signposted shelves are also a big focus area to ensure consumers can efficiently select products with minimal staff interaction in the first instance.

What gives me optimism for the future are the facts that in just six months our industry has accelerated its efficiency, developed levels of resiliency and rapid decision-making and collaboration that previous eluded the sector as a whole. It's because of these factors and the sheer grit to survive that so many individuals and organisations have shown that we are already seeing signs of bounce back.

My hope is that the collaboration, evolution and new-found ability to innovate at pace will help us all to get back to sustainable, future-proofed business.

\*Read more at:

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/magazines/panache/when-will-the-covid-19-pandemic-end-and-how/articleshow/75776122.cms>

<https://www.bloomberg.com/features/2020-coronavirus-drug-vaccine-status/>

\*\*Source: PI Insight; 1,000 nationally representative interviews from 20-24 February

**Footnote:** The SEVA Group is one of just three Diamond Partners at the Moodie Davitt [Virtual Travel Retail Expo](#) in October, alongside China Duty Free Group and Qatar Duty Free.



