

URL: <https://ecorner.stanford.edu/in-brief/confronting-covid-in-the-airline-industry/>

The downturn in global travel due to COVID-19 will impact the airline industry beyond 2020, suggests JetBlue Technology Ventures president Bonny Simi. But airlines are also finding new ways to innovate, and make air travel even safer. At JetBlue Technology Ventures, they are exploring innovations like deploying UV light as a disinfectant, improving contact tracing, and moving toward contactless travel.



Transcript

Bonny People will always need to fly.. 00:00:05,670 And so, there will be airline travel.. Right now, it's only if you, in most cases, it's if you need to, not just doing it more.. So leisure travel is a little off.. In business travel, a lot of businesses are saying, "Well, they're not gonna travel till there's vaccines or whatever." But there, we're starting to see sparks for people coming back.. And you know what? The industry is adapting too, putting in a lot of safety measures, social distancing, et cetera, and people are managing themselves better as well, like masks.. So, this is a time I was a pilot during 9/11, and that was an incredibly challenging time as well.. People were very afraid to fly.. I was a captain at the time and I decided to, I was actually on leave cause I was competing in bobsled this time.. Cause I did finally go back to competing bobsled..

I came off of leave to fly because I felt it was important.. As a mother, as a female and I felt if it- so I started flying the very first day after we were allowed to fly again, just to be out there, to be a public face, to be a figure.. Because the airlines very quickly had adapted on security, to address the challenges of what happened in 9/11 and just the same, the industry's adapting very much around safety.. So when you think of safety and security as they adapt.. So it will take time to get back to the same levels, call it three, four, five years.. But this is also a time for industries to adapt, industries to innovate.. That's what we're doing here.. I run the venture arm for Jet Blue, finding new ways to innovate.. How do we continue to make it even safer? So I'm very bullish on the industry.. It just takes time..

- So what kind of innovations are you saying? 00:01:49,310 I mean, obviously there's ones around safety and sanitation, but what other interesting innovations are you seeing? - My team, I have an awesome team, 00:01:58,900 and we run these things called innovation sprints.. And who would have thought that there would be a need to go out and find how do you use UV light to kill germs on an aircraft? But we went out and found all the different startups that might be doing that.. We've looked into, you know, everything from the health passports that are out there.. How do you do contact tracing? Because that's now gonna be a federal mandate.. How do you track people coming in and manage privacy and all of that? So, you know, there's a lot of different companies exploring that.. So we're able to surface all of those.. We're also in the middle of doing an innovation sprint fall where we flare, find all the different startups, not the big, large public companies, but the quick and nimble startups that are evolving, coming up solutions in contact-less travel.. So the fewer times you actually have to touch something, whether it be a kiosk or going through security or, a ticket or anything through the travel experience.. How can we remove those barriers so that you can go through with your phone, which you're used to carrying and that's yours, it's got your own little germs on it and that's it.. And we know nobody else wants to touch it..

So how can you move through the entire travel experience with just your own devices? So we're doing quite a bit of exploration in that right now...