

WOMEN IN TRAVEL TECH: **Innovators Leading Us Into the Future**



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WOMEN MAKE UP ALMOST HALF OF THE U.S. WORKFORCE, but they hold less than one-third of the leadership positions in technology.

However, companies that are able to expand the roster of women tech leaders witness benefits. Companies where 30 percent of leaders are women have a 15 percent increase in profitability (a net profit margin that's more than 1 percentage point higher) compared with similar companies with no female leaders, according to research from the Peterson Institute for International Economics. BCG and Heidrick & Struggles recently researched what propels women ahead in technology-related fields. Over 750 female and male tech leaders were surveyed, with more than 70 women in tech leadership positions. They found:

- There's no ambition gap. Roughly the same percentage of women and men — 62 percent and 67 percent, respectively — were trying for a promotion.
- Women cite early promotions as critical, more so than men do.
- Women approach the risk associated with pursuing a promotion or new job differently than men. Women are more likely than men to see their technical skills as critical to their advancement.
- Although both men and women agreed that changing employers was a powerful driver of advancement in technology, men changed jobs more frequently than women did.

"To reflect the world around us, we have to include the world around us," says Beth-Anne Bygum, chief security and compliance officer at Acxiom, a customer intelligence company that provides data-driven solutions. "Advancing access to STEM and cybersecurity-related education and jobs is not only a matter of doing the right thing, it's a matter of ensuring competitive advantage in our markets and stimulating innovation across the products and solutions our organizations deliver for next-generation consumers."

At Women Leading Travel & Hospitality, we're obsessed with focusing on actionable steps we can take toward positive change. We conducted our own set of interviews with women in the travel and hospitality sphere of technology. We learned about their career backgrounds and how they achieved their status as innovative leaders. We also asked them for advice for the next generation of women technology leaders. Grab a notepad and pen, the women featured in this report provide unique and applicable insight.

But what I love most is how honest and transparent they were. Their stories had me gasping aloud at my desk, indignant at what women have dealt and continue to deal with. By the end of each interview, however, I was hopeful about the future because of these women leading the charge. Each narrative is like a letter from a dream mentor. I hope you're equally inspired. The future of our industry is better with equal representation across all job functions, including technology roles.

"We believe diversity sparks innovation," notes Acxiom's Chief Information Officer Janet Cinio. "Interacting with a diverse team helps individuals to prepare better and anticipate alternative viewpoints, which helps with innovation. Women bring valuable perspectives and contribute unique ideas to enable better problem-solving skills. It's important to take action for the future generations. When a company is diverse, you see more engaged employees that feel like they belong. The more women we have in the tech field, the more role models young girls will have to look up to in the future. It's important to invest in women in tech to ensure diversity continues to grow beyond our own horizon."

Sally G. Holtgrieve



Sally Holtgrieve
Senior Editor
Women Leading Travel & Hospitality



JODIE BARE

CHIEF INNOVATION OFFICER
COLUMBUS REGIONAL AIRPORT AUTHORITY

What inspired you to pursue a career in technology?

In 1994, I was working as an executive administrative assistant and noticed an opportunity to make my job more efficient through learning technology. I was asked to complete tasks that I was confident that if I learned this new Microsoft product called Access I could make it better. As I became skilled at MS Access I became more curious about other ways technology could advance organizations. This was at a time before Wide Area Networks, email, and e-commerce were prominent.

I wanted to be a part of making people efficient using technology and to watch them experience their world in a whole new way. This spirit has followed me throughout my career. As I answer this question, it makes me realize why I'm so passionate about intelligent transportation systems, smart cities work and advanced mobility initiatives. It's the opportunity to pioneer the way people will travel in the next generation by implementing and learning emergent technologies (e.g., autonomous and connected vehicles, unmanned aircraft).

What's an obstacle you overcame in your career?

My position as chief operating officer was eliminated in 2015 as a result of financial prioritization. When this occurred, I was faced with two big decisions. The most immediate decision was whether to stay on for two weeks (they asked) to help with transitional matters. Having my position eliminated induced a range of emotions. How could I stay on to help with transition when "these people" just turned my world upside down? The idea of taking the high road and not burning bridges became truer in that moment than ever before. I decided to stay on for a few weeks.

The next decision came almost immediately after the difficult conversation which was, "what am I going to do next?" While it wasn't an overnight decision, I quickly decided to take a risk and a leap of faith to start my own management consulting business. I was fortunate to have my first project

within a month of launching, and steady work thereafter. It was this decision that was pivotal, and I would realize that two years later. I came to know of smart cities work and advanced mobility initiatives through my work as a small business owner. I was presented an amazing opportunity to lead all the IT initiatives for Smart Columbus. This was another major decision point in my career — to contemplate leaving my own, successful business and join the City of Columbus as a full-time employee. I decided to put my business on hold and join the city. It was the best decision. I made a lot of sacrifices doing so, but that work led me to where I am today, and I'm grateful.

What are you doing to help get more women into technology positions, including leadership roles?

Elevate. Mentor. Inspire. I'm actively involved with a local organization called Get Women in Technology (getWITit). I was a keynote speaker at its Women in Technology Conference. My focus is on obstacles women face in our technical careers, managing through it and, moreover, why it's an exciting time for women to be in tech!

I wouldn't be where I am today if others didn't help advocate for me. I believe in paying it forward. I appreciate opportunities to elevate other women. For example, for my keynote event I suggested sharing the stage with three other women to share their stories, too (this is elevating other women!). I like to bring women to the table to tell their story to inspire and motivate. And I think reflecting with others is therapeutic and creates a moment for celebrating the journey.

Mentorship is another area of opportunity to get women out there. Help women know they're not alone. The road has been traveled. I've talked to young women starting their careers in tech — including my own daughter. I love to share potential opportunities and get them excited. I spend time with women on my team leading by example and having conversations directly about stigmas women have, issues women face even still today, and the trek of perseverance. I lead with vulnerability. I openly share my successes and challenges with my direct reports (composed of men and women). I promote women in technology to leadership roles whenever there's a culture and skill set match. True for everything, diversity simply makes the team stronger. Women bring a different perspective. Diversifying a team doesn't just help women, it helps the overall success for any organization.

What advice do you have for other women that might be considering a career in technology?

Now is the time — it's better than ever before. Technology isn't just hardware, software development and network communications anymore. Technology is so much more. Technology is a vast field that includes leading solutions with user experience and design thinking, data analytics for predictive decision making for safer roadways (i.e., connected vehicles, autonomous vehicles, smart work zones, dynamic traffic management, shared ride services). It also includes data analytics for tailored, on-demand customer experiences and the science of artificial intelligence and machine learning as well as cybersecurity. The list can go on.

I want to see leaders, regardless of their technical acumen, understand the importance of technology and that results are realized with planning and time. IT is systematic, deep, impactful and strategic.

Technology is a key part of organizational strategy. It isn't just the engineering nuts and bolts anymore. It's thinking about organizational effectiveness, operational efficiencies, enhanced customer experiences, and the role innovation and technology plays in delivering results for top-line growth and bottom-line performance. The skills needed to play in technology are considerable and really span personalities and skill set strengths. Women bring a diverse way of thinking about solutions and ways to execute on ideas. A balanced technology team only leads to stronger results.

What is a future goal/career aspiration?

So many organizations don't realize the value of IT and the critical role it plays in strategy development and execution. I'm fortunate to work somewhere that's starting to embrace this notion as my position is the first chief innovation officer at the Columbus Regional Airport Authority. Our CEO had the vision two years ago to see the importance of innovation and technology in the future state. My aspiration is that IT will be respected and appreciated for the strategic role it has in an organization.

I think IT is often still viewed as the people who keep the email and laptops working and the lights on in the data center. I want to see leaders, regardless of their technical acumen, understand the importance of technology and that results are realized with planning and time. IT is systematic, deep, impactful and strategic. IT professionals must constantly keep learning and evolving because technology changes so rapidly. Consequently, team dynamics are in transformation constantly.

Keeping skills relevant and driving change for what's to come based on technology relevance and trends requires pushing on the culture of an organization. It's hard work. It's constant change management. It's technical skill development; recalibrating and upskilling on the regular. It's having the skills to sell it and make people realize it's for the good of the organization (and not for the sake of IT), while also having the ability to engineer and execute. IT is an amazing field. I've had the privilege to watch it evolve from being a true engineering discipline and expanding into so much more. There are so many tentacles to IT. Certainly a lot to appreciate and respect.

How is your company using technology to help solve internal and external pain points?

Data. Data. Data. We're actively building our data program through ideation sessions around real problems we could solve if we had access to certain data. Data programs can be daunting to establish, especially if you try to eat the elephant all in one bite. We will establish a minimum viable product of our master data management program by solving for two specific use cases that will lead to saving a considerable amount of time each day as a result of access to siloed data on one platform and automating several tasks that are manual today. We will demonstrate the value of data and how data can help create efficiencies in the organization. We're also exploring the role that data plays in our ability to enhance passenger experiences in travel, including monitoring and managing certain activities in the security checkpoint line, routing shuttle buses based on demand vs. fixed routes, estimating time-to-gate for passenger travel planning, and wayfinding for parking.

What are some of the emerging technologies that you believe will have the biggest impact on the industry in the next 12 months?

I believe there will be more on-demand and contactless experiences coming up. This will take shape in different ways such as ordering food enroute to the airport for pickup inside the terminal on the way to the gate (and perhaps even delivery to the gate); checking bags without kiosk-printed bag tags and instead using RFID bag tags; and checking out at the stores inside airports with automatic payment as you walk out using Apple Pay or other wallet technology. I don't think this will be prominent per se in 12 months, but I think travelers will start seeing more of this than they do today. These contactless experiences will continue to gain momentum.

Has the timeline for purchasing and implementing technology at your organization sped up or changed due to COVID?

Our purchasing and implementation have increased since COVID, but not because of COVID. When COVID hit, we were just starting our digital transformation journey. This journey is requiring considerable procurement and implementations in the way of enterprise systems, modernizing infrastructure, strengthening cybersecurity and consolidating systems, and streamlining processes.



NATALIA BAYONA

**DIRECTOR OF INNOVATION,
EDUCATION AND INVESTMENTS
WORLD TOURISM ORGANIZATION**

What inspired you to pursue a career in technology?

The decision to complement my career of more than 15 years in tourism with technology arose from recognizing technology as the ideal ally for the development and sustainability of the sector. Understanding how imperative this convergence was, (considering that tourism is still an under-digitized sector as well as the benefits it could bring), I joined UNWTO in 2018 to establish from scratch the Innovation and Digital Transformation department, which is now called Innovation, Education, and Investment, which I'm honored to lead. Throughout this process, the alignment between technology and tourism has served to create an innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem that helps to maximize the potential of the sector in terms of economic growth, job creation, and sustainable development.

What is an obstacle you overcame in your career?

I was quite young when I started my career (20 years old). When you're young and female — breaking into such a competitive industry — it's natural to feel overwhelmed, as many people think you may not yet be ready to hold a position with a lot of responsibility at such a young age. Nevertheless, throughout my career I've been inspired and supported by outstanding mentors who always empowered

me and taught me that youth should not be a barrier if motivation, preparation and proactivity prevail. Today as a director, I'm convinced of the potential of young people, especially in the tourism sector. Therefore, our innovation team consists of talented, skilled and efficient millennials and centennials.

What are you doing to help get more women into technology positions, including leadership roles?

As part of the tech-driven activities offered within UNWTO, the Startup Challenges and Competitions have been the breeding ground for women-led startups in the tourism sector. As a result of our innovation initiatives, we've opened spaces for female-led startups by connecting them with investors from UNWTO's Innovation Network. Providing them with capacity-building opportunities with strategic partners such as Google for Startups, Amazon Web Services, Mastercard, among others; offering them the essential entrepreneurial skills to continue scaling their ventures while at the same time narrowing the gender gap in the sector. As of today, more than 50 percent of the entrepreneurs in our innovation ecosystem are women.

What advice do you have for other women that might be considering a career in technology?

All I would like to say to them is: you are the future of the travel industry. Given the imperative need to rapidly digitize tourism, it will be necessary to put technology-based solutions as the driving forces that will shape the evolution of the sector. Approximately 25 percent of women globally are pursuing a career in a technology-related field; this indicates that we must foster and nurture in the upcoming female generations a fondness for science, innovation and programming in order to attain more high-tech startups, businesses and ideas developed by women. Since tourism is the sector that has the largest number of women and young people employed, it would be rewarding to see the sector's workforce taking the lead in boosting tourism's tech potential in the medium and long term.

What is a future goal/career aspiration?

From a very young age I dreamed and cherished the ambition of working for the United Nations. Today I can say that I've fulfilled this goal. Not only because I belong to one of the United Nations' specialized agencies, but also because I'm working in the agency in charge of fostering and strengthening a more inclusive, sustainable and innovative tourism sector — the sector in which I've forged my career. Moving forward, my aspiration is to keep serving the tourism sector, its workforce, and stakeholders involved in its value chain; supporting UNWTO; representing women that identify with my journey, proving to them that everything is possible through self-commitment and perseverance; and to proudly represent my country (Colombia).

The alignment between technology and tourism has served to create an innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem that helps to maximize the potential of the sector in terms of economic growth, job creation, and sustainable development.

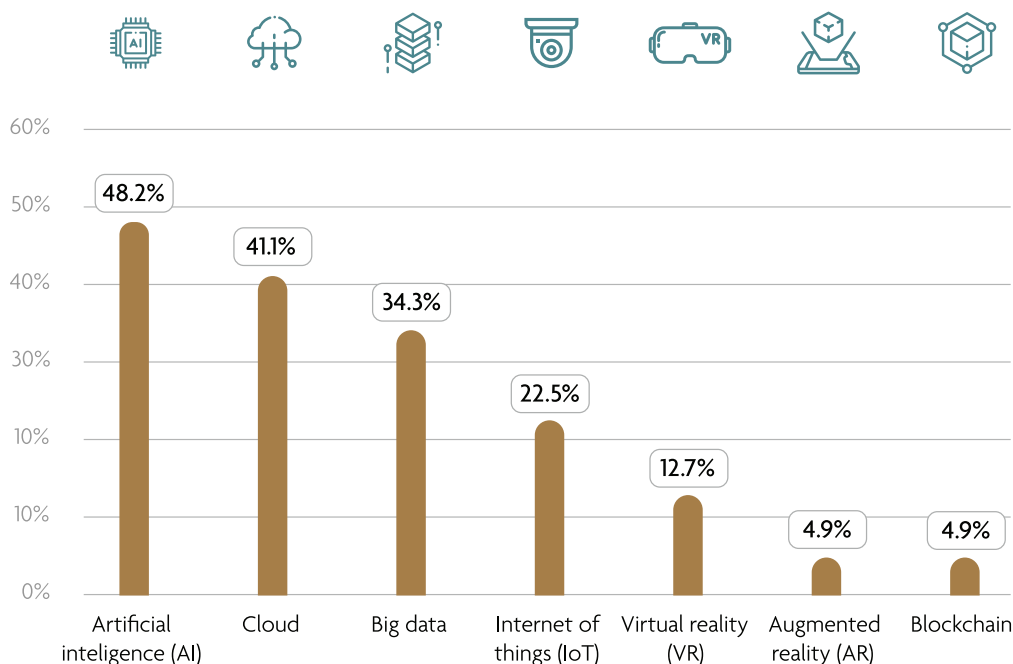
How is your company using technology to help solve internal and external pain points?

As I mentioned above, even before the pandemic we identified that technology must be positioned as the epicenter of all tourism-related strategies. Hence, we developed challenges and competitions to find technological solutions able to advance the digitization of the sector. However, when COVID-19 hit, those challenges started to fulfill a different function in society. Instead, they became the ideal mechanism to find startups that might contribute to mitigating the impacts of the pandemic. Through competitions such as the UNWTO Healing Solutions, UNWTO SDG Startup Competition, UNWTO x Sommet Hospitality Challenge, and the UNWTO Rural Startup competition (between 2020 and 2021), UNWTO has been able to identify projects capable of helping the sector's prompt recovery, whether through biosecurity and air purification solutions, COVID passports, high-tech systems for the promotion of rural tourism experiences, co-living tools, among others.

What are some of the emerging technologies that you believe will have the biggest impact on the industry in the next 12 months?

According to UNWTO's [Travel and Tourism Tech Startup Ecosystem and Investment Landscape](#) report, and based on the top 100 tourism startups that have taken part in any of the challenges and competitions, these are the main technologies that are leading the sector and will impact it within the next 12 months:

As seen, (AI) remains the preferred solution, as 42.2 percent of the top tourism startups stated offering their services mainly related to accommodation, travel arrangements, and food and beverage. Cloud-related technologies like databases and storage servers are also part of the preferred tech tools of the top startups, representing 40 percent of the entrepreneurs, to provide solutions mainly for hotels and hospitality management, events, and MCCI. Lastly, 25.6 percent use the Internet of things (IoT) to develop tourism solutions mainly related to services as information, guides, destination management organizations services, and internet publishing, broadcasting, consultancy and web research.



Note: Multiple answers were possible.



JO BERRINGTON

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, BRAND AND COMMUNICATION
YOTEL HQ

Have you had mentors as you've grown in your career? What role has mentorship played in your career? Are you a mentor to others?

Yes, absolutely. Pretty much without exception all the leaders I've worked with have been amazing mentors for me, but equally so have my peer group and my team. I don't think I could even start to name individuals; there are so many I'd be bound to miss someone.

Then there are people that you meet in your career who are just super special to you and you turn to for more strategic advice and problem solving, mostly because they're engaging, amazing listeners, and wise beyond my dreams.

I hope that I'm a mentor to others. Sometimes we find it difficult to make time to talk and support people when life is so busy professionally and personally. There are times when it's tempting not to respond when someone reaches out, but I try to put myself in their shoes and make time.

What has your experience been like being a female leader in a male-dominated field (technology)?

At YOTEL we take a view that brand and technology are intrinsically linked so we don't really see the tech piece as a separate team. No longer is tech just about a set of systems; it's linked 100 percent to the overall customer journey. Whether it's a traditional hotel or a tech-forward hotel like YOTEL, women are still playing catch up in numbers. I'm proud of the voice that I've been given, especially in such a tech-oriented business as ours. I hope that other women will see all the leaders that organizations like yours are profiling and that will help drive momentum.

What's a career achievement that you're most proud of? Why?

Being a founding member of the team at YOTEL. Not many people get the opportunity to launch a new brand and the best bit of that journey — apart from the day we took our first ever booking for our first hotel, probably spending a year on and off in New York launching our first city center hotel. Jay Z called it right, "Concrete jungle where dreams are made of, there's nothing you can't do ..."

Is there an example of you taking a major risk in your career?

When I joined the London Eye in 2000, I was on secondment from British Airways, six years later and still having the best time of my life. It was a difficult and potentially risky decision to leave a huge brand like British Airways to come to a new startup based on a concept of selling small rooms by the hour.

Can you tell us about a recent successful technology rollout at your company, and your role in that project?

We've just launched a new app in a joint project with our IT and Commercial departments. It's been super tricky to implement due to the crazy array of systems and interfaces that a global hotel company uses. A lot of patience has been required, but we're getting there and 'SmartKey,' our mobile key product has been finally launched, a critical piece of our lo-touch, hi-tech customer journey.

How do you foresee your company's technology budget shifting for the remainder of 2021 and into 2022?

Our industry has been hit super hard so we're very mindful, like everyone else, that every single penny of investment that we recommend to our CEO and the board has to show a return — e.g., an increase in direct bookings and revenue or enhance the low-touch customer journey for our guests, all even more critical as we start to emerge from the pandemic. For 2022, we're already committed and have started work on web, booking engine and app enhancements.

What are the technology trends you're watching closely right now that you believe will have a big impact on the travel and hospitality industry in 2022?

We're already well known for our creative approach to technology and automation. For example, we use robots extensively in our hotels for luggage storage and delivery of amenities. Of course they will never 100 percent replace guests' interaction with our crew, but they're super useful to do a lot of the legwork, freeing up our crew to assist guests with other things. They also have a role to play entertaining guests! We're also looking at personalization, increasing low-touch.

How do you motivate your executive leadership team to get buy-in for new technology systems/solutions?

We have a super supportive CEO and board, but we do have a very robust process that does involve everyone right at the start. We have an amazing leadership team that does discuss and work together to make sure that before we present something to our CEO and subsequently the board that everyone's happy and we're all on board.

How have you dealt with the challenge of managing your technology road map in the current COVID-impacted environment?

Yes, it's been a challenge, but if anything we've accelerated our investment into tech and brought forward our road map. COVID gave us a few moments to step back and review our strategy. We went right back to basics, reviewed our mission, vision and values as a brand, and then sensor checked everything we're doing in all areas, but especially in tech to make sure.

How are you promoting diversity in the tech leadership space?

In my particular space in brand and communications my role is to help drive tech and innovation forward to enhance the brand for our customers and investors. We have just launched a new diversity and inclusion strategy and policy, but it will only be effective if we really do everything we can to support it. Across the hospitality industry it's not only in tech that we need work on but many other areas, too!



JODIE BRINKERHOFF

**VICE PRESIDENT OF INNOVATION
DALLAS FORT WORTH INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT (DFW)**

What inspired you to pursue a career in technology?

I was living in San Francisco in my early 20s during the first dot-com boom. I was working for a credit card bank at the time that startups all around me were throwing elaborate parties and launching businesses left and right. My role at the bank positioned me to work with new and emerging tech businesses in the Silicon Valley, as well as behemoths like Disney that were getting into e-commerce and online advertising partnerships in multimillion dollar ways. That's where I got my first taste of life near the cutting edge of technology.

What's an obstacle you overcame in your career?

In the middle of a business pitch to a prospective Fortune 50 client, the then president of my company put his hand over my mouth and told me to "shhhhhush." It was so offensive — to me and to the client — that we were escorted out after the meeting and almost immediately told we had no shot at the deal — a direct result of the executive's behavior. Navigating through that period of time was a series of life lessons, but on the other side of it I found great things. #knowwhentofoldem

What are you doing to help get more women into technology positions, including leadership roles?

I'm still on this journey, figuring out what I can influence and how. Having spent time in financial services, technology and now aviation, you get used to being one of the few women in the room. So the first step is recognizing when you are. Then calling it out. I'm proud to say that right now, five of my six team members are women — in an industry that's only about 20 percent to 30 percent women overall. So there's an opportunity to do more on all fronts.

What advice do you have for other women that might be considering a career in technology?

Just do it. Tech is advancing so quickly and there's this unique dynamic where people coming out of school can learn so much — and become experts in a way that might take decades in other job functions or categories. Plus, technology is always changing so if you have a curious mindset and enjoy problem solving, you're setting yourself up for an exciting career.

What's a future goal/career aspiration?

Short of running a palapa bar on a tropical island? Just kidding. As I look to the future, it's about having impact and helping others do the same. What shape that takes exactly ... we'll see.

How is your company using technology to help solve internal and external pain points?

At DFW, the Innovation team is focused on several key areas, including automation and efficient mobility, data-driven decision making, the seamless passenger journey, safety and security, and new ventures. While our team is typically focused on a three- to 10-year time horizon, in the last year it's been all hands on deck and everyone was very focused on immediate health and safety needs and anything related to business resiliency — all helping to manage the effects of the pandemic. We led tests of new cleaning and sanitization technologies, thermal cameras for temperature checking, and we looked at ways to understand customer flows so we can inform strategies for social distancing and other operational initiatives. We continue to work closely with airline and federal partners to develop digital alternatives to traditional activities — all in the spirit of going "touchless" and removing friction from the end-to-end customer journey.

As we pivot from "COVID response" to refocus on the longer-term future, we're looking at human capital and new business models to drive sustainability, resiliency and efficiency. We're asking ourselves, "what are those 'force multipliers' that help us become more intelligent about our operations, like augmented intelligence ... be more efficient, like robotics ..." and so on. In an effort to empower "everyday innovators" and scale innovation impact, we're also providing innovation education to our employees across the enterprise. It's not always all about technology, but it is about delivering on a brand promise of "Travel. Transformed."

What are some of the emerging technologies that you believe will have the biggest impact on the industry in the next 12 months?

We will continue to look at emerging technologies as enablers for us to solve problems. So if I think about the average customer coming out of a pandemic, then I have to put their core need for safety and security at the top of our priorities. We'll continue to see implementation of technologies that help us deliver on health and wellness commitments, contactless and touchless initiatives, and anything else that reduces stress for the customer. Some of the technologies we're looking at to support these initiatives include biometrics, IoT, digital humans, and 5G connectivity, which will ultimately unlock the power to support so much more data and greater intelligence.

Has the timeline for purchasing and implementing technology at your organization sped up or changed due to COVID?

I think COVID provided a reminder that we can move quickly — with a sense of real urgency — when we all come together and focus on the customer (and employees). This period has been an exercise in communication, collaboration, creativity and agility. The spirit of innovation has been widespread and exhilarating. While I'm ready for the "next normal," I do hope those behaviors and attitudes stick!



AMY BURR

**PRESIDENT
JETBLUE TECHNOLOGY VENTURES**

Have you had mentors as you've grown in your career? What role has mentorship played in your career? Are you a mentor to others?

There are several amazing mentors who have helped me be a successful leader in my career. They taught me how to better interact with others within an organization, how to present myself and my work to senior leaders, how to interact with the board of a company, along with many other valuable lessons. Each has helped me improve at various points of my career. I hope that I'm seen as the same type of mentor to people who are younger in their career. I do mentor others as they need it and enjoy doing so.

What has your experience been like being a female leader in a male-dominated field (technology)?

I've worked in the aviation sector for 20 years, and I've often been the only female leader in a room. Sometimes it's hard to believe that our industry hasn't made more progress, but I've seen improvements as companies begin to emphasize diversification at more senior levels. JetBlue Technology Ventures (JTV) is one of the companies I've worked for that champions women leadership the most, as our founder Bonny Simi has always been a very outspoken advocate for women in business.

Organizations need to be diligent about bringing in women analysts, managers and directors that can grow into C-suite roles. When I have the opportunity to mentor women, I remind them that while they might sometimes be the only woman at the table, they still need to make sure they take that seat and that their voice is heard. The more we're able to encourage younger women to excel, the better off our industry is.

What's a career achievement that you're most proud of? Why?

I'm incredibly proud that I was able to help build Virgin America to become the amazing company and airline that it is. It was such a beloved product by customers, which was a direct result of the hard work we all put into it over many years together. I played many roles in the development of Virgin America and am proud that my contributions helped shape the company.

Is there an example of you taking a major risk in your career? How did it turn out for you?

I've taken many major risks in my career that led to where I am today. The first was leaving my work in sports medicine and getting my MBA to enter the business world. I've always been open to taking a role that pushes me out of my comfort zone and am a strong believer in my ability to figure it all out. I may not have always had the experience typically needed for a role, but I was (and still am!) confident in my ability to learn what's needed to be successful. Another major risk I took was taking a role with Virgin America as employee No. 20 when the organization was still a startup. It worked out incredibly well, both as a successful tenure for my personal career and as a successful startup.

Can you tell us about a recent successful technology rollout at your company, and your role in that project?

A big part of JTV's role is to identify and bring new technologies to JetBlue that improve both the airline's operations and customer experience. We do this through strategic startup introductions to JetBlue business units. This value and support extends to our subsidiary, JetBlue Travel Products (JTP). JTP approached us seeking help sourcing startups in the short-term rental space. Our team began by examining all of the startups in the vacation rental market and creating a market map of everything that was out there. From there, we worked to identify and screen startups based on current business needs and made introductions from the top contenders. JTP recently implemented one of our recommended startups at select JetBlue locations, with plans to expand.

How do you foresee your company's technology budget shifting for the remainder of 2021 and into 2022?

Our business is focused on investing in strategic startups in travel technology. We're fully engaged with investing in 2021, and plan to continue to invest in new startups at the same level into 2022.

What are the technology trends you're watching closely right now that you believe will have a big impact on the travel and hospitality industry in 2022?

The pandemic gave rise to three major areas of opportunity in travel. Contactless technology will continue to remain a priority as a new industry standard moving forward. Short-term rentals also became popular, and we see this trend reflected in mergers and acquisitions of key players. One area that's remained constant is sustainability, perhaps the most important focus of all, and we're particularly interested in identifying transportation solutions powered by alternative propulsion systems.

I've worked in the aviation sector for 20 years, and I've often been the only female leader in a room. Sometimes it's hard to believe that our industry hasn't made more progress, but I've seen improvements as companies begin to emphasize diversification at more senior levels.



How do you motivate your executive leadership team to get buy-in for new technology systems/solutions?

When JTV was first created, it was established as a separate subsidiary from JetBlue. This independence has allowed us to think outside the box and integrate new, creative thinking with our operational requirements, as well as to explore what's next in our industry.

Even with this autonomy, corporate venture firms need serious buy-in at the top level to be successful. JTV has support from not only the senior leadership team at JetBlue, but also the board of directors. With that level of endorsement, we're able to build trust internally, further increasing value for its startups and JetBlue.

How have you dealt with the challenge of managing your technology road map in the current COVID-impacted environment?

Like many travel-focused companies, our team had to quickly pivot from "business as usual" to adjust to a new normal. Our focus during the pandemic was twofold: most of our time was spent helping JetBlue and our partners manage through the current disruption by seeking innovative solutions to address the unprecedented challenges faced by the travel industry. We also prioritized our portfolio companies and their continued success by providing financial, operations, network, administration and marketing consultation.

How are you promoting diversity in the tech leadership space?

We have a strong focus on diversity within our own organization. That starts with building relationships and ensuring we have a diverse candidate pool during the hiring process. We also spend time with our portfolio companies to help ensure that they have strong, diverse candidate pools for roles. Our team also helps mentor and promote diverse startup founders when possible. Lastly, we belong to and participate in many organizations that have a strong focus on promoting diversity within their industry.



UMA GOPINATH

CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER
METROLINX

Have you had mentors as you've grown in your career? What role has mentorship played in your career? Are you a mentor to others?

I wouldn't be who I am and where I am in my career without the support of mentors. Mentors are like your board of directors – so pick more than one, and make sure they're strong and have a range of strengths. You want someone who will make you grow. Most of my mentors continue to be my mentors even after several years. Their engagement has changed over time, but I stay connected with the ones who have had the greatest impact on me.

And now it's my turn to pay it forward by mentoring others in their career journeys. I have four to six mentees at any given time, ranging from young people in school, new graduates, and people with established careers.

What has your experience been like being a female leader in a male-dominated field (technology)?

There are very few female leaders in technology and even fewer BIPOC female leaders. Once you're successful, people say "I don't see you as a female or as a visible minority." My response is usually something like this: "I want you to see me as a female and a person of color, and appreciate that my journey is very different from other technology leaders."

Growing up in India, I didn't feel different in school. While pursuing my Engineering degree, my class was split 50 percent between males and females. After graduation and in the professional world, that ratio looks significantly different, and the air gets rarer as you move closer to the top.

My counsel to other women: you have to earn a seat at the table and continue to keep it, with poise, capabilities and execution. If you're a successful female leader, please help other women get there by sharing your lived experiences.

What's a career achievement that you're most proud of? Why?

I've been in the "corporate" world for over 30 years now and delivered several large projects and programs – transformational, innovative and delivering on a range of benefits. I'm extremely proud of being the diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) sponsor at my last company. It was about people, improving fairness and equity in the workplace, and ensuring that the employee life cycle was inclusive. It was hard but fulfilling work. It opened my eyes to systemic flaws in our processes, identifying the unconscious biases that are embedded in our day-to-day world.

Is there an example of you taking a major risk in your career? How did it turn out for you?

I've been fortunate to work on several interesting projects in multiple countries. For the first 25 years they were similar in that they were large, transformational, big cost and big benefit programs. I had an opportunity to take a leadership role in a newly formed AI and innovation team which operated as a startup within a large corporation. It was the best move I made. The pace of delivery and the adrenaline rush that comes from successful experimentation, combined with the learnings – it was magical.

Can you tell us about a recent successful technology rollout at your company, and your role in that project?

We recently implemented a document management system and search capability for our Legal and Finance teams. It was the first of its kind for Metrolinx in many ways. We shifted from waterfall to lean-agile delivery, leveraged MACH principles for interfaces between systems, and had several other "firsts" on this project. The project was delivered ahead of schedule, at lower cost and with higher quality.

I was the transformation champion, teaching and coaching the team to make the shift in the early days and cheering them on as the project hit its delivery groove.

The path wasn't perfect, but we were paving the way for other projects following it. We shared our learnings regularly so other teams wouldn't hit some of the bumps we did.

How do you foresee your company's technology budget shifting for the remainder of 2021 and into 2022?

COVID-19 has disrupted life and the corporate world in many ways. In the technology field, we're focused on ensuring everyone can work from home and has the tools required to perform. We also have increased our focus on cybersecurity as the landscape of how we work has changed with so many of our staff working from their homes.

In technology, our approach is to tackle many small projects vs. one big project. As a result, we're delivering value much faster – in weeks and months vs. months and years.

Once you're successful, people say "I don't see you as a female or as a visible minority." My response is usually something like this: "I want you to see me as a female and a person of color, and appreciate that my journey is very different from other technology leaders."

What are the technology trends you're watching closely right now that you believe will have a big impact on the travel and hospitality industry in 2022?

We must watch the return to the next normal and how customer behaviors and preferences evolve. And we have to be ready to respond to them — resilience is key. We want our customers to know the safety precautions in place so they can trust that they're safe during their rides.

Transit will no longer be a way to get from point A to point B. It will be part of the "Job to be Done" — and that job could be work, leisure, tourism or an event. We have to look at the customer journey from the pre-trip, trip and post-trip data points to derive the right solutions.

Artificial intelligence, prediction models, autonomy in operations, connected world (IoT Things, Employees, Customers), cybersecurity and sustainability ... these are examples of technology areas that I'm watching very closely as they will change how we operate our business.

How do you motivate your executive leadership team to get buy-in for new technology systems/solutions?

You have to be at the table — the strategy table — jointly working on solutions with other C-level leaders. Technology is evolving so fast that it's not obvious how it can be leveraged in our business.

The technology team's role is to look for those new areas and connect the dots on how we can leverage them. We should harness the power of machines not just to do things better, but to do better things.

How are you promoting diversity in the tech leadership space?

Our CEO is very passionate about promoting diversity in the workplace, and I indicated earlier that this is of utmost importance for me. At Metrolinx I&IT, we're intentional about hiring more diverse individuals on our team. We've formed a women in technology forum called the GO Tech Women — for women, by women. We focus on opportunities that are top of mind for the team, such as networking, mentoring and skills upgrade.

We've created courses to help people understand what diversity means, not just from a gender perspective, including being more in tune with unconscious and conscious biases. Diversity and inclusion isn't just a "thing" we talk about here at Metrolinx. It's part of our culture and we're richer for it.





JACQUELINE HAMPTON

FOUNDER
PORTICO

Have you had mentors as you've grown in your career? What role has mentorship played in your career? Are you a mentor to others?

I think mentorship is incredibly important. Early in my career, I had several more traditional mentors, where we met regularly over a few years. As I grew in my career, my perspective on mentorship changed. I realized there was a much broader opportunity to take advantage of “mentoring moments” with people throughout my network. A mentoring moment can happen in a 15-minute chat, or perhaps it’s multiple short conversations over the course of a few years. The key is what transpires between the two people. An aura of trust is essential. My mentors always listen closely, suggest a new perspective to consider or provide some insight, and encourage me to grow and address new challenges. They also support me in doing so. I’ve taken this mental model of mentorship and used it myself to mentor others. For me, the essential first step is active listening and asking questions. Often in asking calm, thoughtful questions, you can see the other person start to benefit right away.

What has your experience been like being a female leader in a male-dominated field (technology)?

Much of my career has been in male-dominated industries. When I was an investment banker, the issue of diversity was well recognized and there was substantial structure and support around me as I worked for Fortune 500 companies. My key goals then were to excel at my job, proving that gender didn’t matter, and to mentor younger women in the field. In early-stage tech, it’s a more nuanced experience. While there

are many allies and support systems proactively helping, there’s also an underlying nagging sense that you’re not being included in all the conversations. I’m hopeful this will change in the future, as we each do our part to recognize diverse talent and be more inclusive of a variety of perspectives.

What is a career achievement that you’re most proud of? Why?

Creating Portico is by far my proudest accomplishment. Portico started when my worlds collided together at Springpad (a personal organizer with 5 million registered users), which I hacked for the purpose of planning travel. Merging that with my media background, I envisioned a place for leisure travelers to finally house their entire world of travel. A place to save dreams and get inspired (which is so needed today given the pandemic), easily turn those dreams to reality with friends and family when you’re ready, and to savor the memories and share with friends afterward.

While many had tried before, the timing finally felt right. Technology had advanced significantly and the comfort level of people using that tech and storing data in the cloud had changed dramatically. All that said, I knew it would still be an uphill battle. I fortunately found an amazing team who believed in the mission of making it easier for people to have more fun planning culturally enriching travel, and we built Portico together. Nothing makes me happier than hearing user comments like, “I used to hate trip planning and now I love it.” Or, “Portico was my lifeline during lockdown. I used it almost daily.” Or “It’s what I used to create in Google Docs but so much more fun and inspirational.”

Is there an example of you taking a major risk in your career? How did it turn out for you?

One major risk I took was leaving Time Inc. and New York City to move to Boston, not knowing what was next in my career. Shortly after arriving in Boston, I decided to indulge a passion and attended four months of culinary school at Cambridge School of Culinary Arts. I’m eternally grateful for having had that opportunity. Also, without moving to Boston and finding Springpad, Portico never would have been born. Sometimes you have to take that leap of faith into the unknown for new doors to open. I’m incredibly proud of the Portico team and what we’ve created, and excited to experience the inevitable twists and turns ahead.

Can you tell us about a recent successful technology rollout at your company, and your role in that project?

We knew from the beginning that Portico would need to be on all platforms. We started on the web as the majority of planning happens there, often in short spurts between meetings or in the evenings. Since 60-plus percent of our users were iOS, that was next on the road map. We started building with outside help ... and several months later we knew something wasn’t right. The technology wasn’t living up to the sophistication of Portico and was breaking too frequently. It was a gutsy move when my team suggested we scrap it and rebuild in a new language. I trusted them and time has proven it to be the right decision. We found an amazing iOS devel-

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oper, re-envisioned the product in a staged approach, and launched the initial version within four months. Almost a year later now, our iOS app gets rave reviews and over 35 percent of monthly users access it.

How do you foresee your company's technology budget shifting for the remainder of 2021 and into 2022?

Our core focus in 2021 was iOS. We have a few aspects to finish and then will shift our attention to focus on better surfacing the wealth of content we've created for our users to help their planning, some new highly requested features, and later in 2022, exploring an Android app.

What are the technology trends you're watching closely right now that you believe will have a big impact on the travel and hospitality industry in 2022?

Contactless technology, data privacy and personalization are key trends I'm watching. Contactless technology has already significantly advanced during the pandemic based on my recent travels, especially in airports. But I see this going much further with hotels in areas such as mobile check-in, self-service and chatbots, and also with restaurants and other experiences; for example, mobile waiting lists on Yelp and other services. Data privacy and personalization are intricately intertwined, and it will be interesting to see how it plays out. While consumers seem to appreciate personalization, they also want control over their data. Of course, recent changes by Apple and Google make this control easier for consumers. The travel industry has to figure out how to navigate this path, respecting its customers' concerns and finding new ways to surprise and delight them.

How do you motivate your executive leadership team to get buy-in for new technology systems/solutions?

Our approach is very collaborative among the senior team. For any big new technology idea, we discuss and weigh the impact on strategic initiatives, users' experience and flow, dev reliability and smoothness, and effort of technical implementation. Given our early stage, we're also constantly prioritizing among the various initiatives. We've always found an agreed upon path forward.

How have you dealt with the challenge of managing your technology road map in the current COVID-impacted environment?

When stay-at-home orders started, our team had many discussions about what it meant to be in travel at that moment and how we could adjust. After a momentary pause, we realized people needed continued inspiration and to travel dream, while being respectful of the fact that we shouldn't actually travel. We immediately paused our iOS development and focused on key web enhancements since we knew people were at home and spending more time on laptops. We explored the idea of surfacing COVID-related information for people, but ultimately decided not to as there were so many people trying to do that and instead focused on content that would be useful for them now, like road trip or staycation ideas. Then as I mentioned earlier, we pivoted our approach on iOS with the goal of having the app available by the time people could travel again.

How are you promoting diversity in the tech leadership space?

Promoting and supporting diverse voices in both tech and travel are incredibly important. For me, this needs to happen both within Portico and within the community. I consider it in our team (which is more than 50 percent female), along with voices that we feature across social media and our blog. We're actively working to make this diversity even broader. I also support diversity through conversation in various founders' groups, supporting voices on my personal social media, and through participation in groups like All Raise and Women Leading Travel & Hospitality.



MUIELLE MONTECALVO

CEO AND FOUNDER
VACAYOU WELLNESS TRAVEL

What has your experience been like being a female leader in a male-dominated field (technology)?

The best word to use ... interesting! Overall, I find it's a male-dominated field not just in travel, but across all sectors of technology. Men are often seen as "natural leaders" in tech, financial and business, whereas women who are seen as too outgoing and chatty are assumed that they may not be able to accomplish the same tasks. Often, we have to work harder to be respected and seen as equal authoritative figures as our male counterparts.

Women are more comfortable asking for help if there are things they don't understand, and this shouldn't be seen as a weakness, but as a strength of a good leader. According to the Kauffman Foundation, there's plenty of evidence to back this up. Its research shows private technology companies led by women are more capital efficient, achieving a 35 percent higher return on investment, and when venture-backed have 12 percent higher revenue than startups run by men, yet there continues to be a huge gap in funding women founders.

What's a career achievement that you're most proud of? Why?

My career has revolved mainly around sales leadership roles where I've been fortunate to have many as a high-volume leader. There are two that really stand out for me that I feel proud of. The first was when I joined a company in 2002 and

took an underperforming territory generating \$750,000 a year in revenue and turned it into ARR of \$6 million in committed contracts all in under a year by bringing in multiple new accounts. The second was when I took the leap to start my own company, watching it go from a dream to a business plan to gain traction as a brand over the last two years, even during the pandemic. The why? I attribute many of these accomplishments to hard work, commitment and, most importantly, to the people and team I'm surrounded by who believe in me, the vision, and the dream.

Is there an example of you taking a major risk in your career? How did it turn out for you?

Yes, I was just out of high school and was told you need to find a career that gives you stability. I had graduated from a small business school in Ireland and had a good entry-level job with a steady paycheck, although there was something that just didn't seem right. I wanted to get out and see the world! I jumped on a plane with two duffle bags and a guitar and moved to the U.S. I went back to university, got my B.A., and took my first sales role. I don't regret a minute of it. I started travelling a lot for work (which I loved) and quickly became a top producer in the company. My career in sales and networking was born!

Can you tell us about a recent successful technology rollout at your company, and your role in that project?

We're about to launch the first part of our proprietary system built specifically for Vacayou, and while I may be driving the ship, I must give credit to my fantastic and dedicated tech team for taking the whiteboard ideas and really spearheading this project towards completion. They've worked hard to push and make sure the deployment is a success.

How do you foresee your company's technology budget shifting for the remainder of 2021 and into 2022?

We recently designed a new platform that we're rolling out in Q4. This platform will need ongoing components over the next few years that we feel are important to our next phase, so I see our budget growing significantly focused on our tech goals as we scale.

What are the technology trends you're watching closely right now that you believe will have a big impact on the travel and hospitality industry in 2022?

COVID has driven a lot of new technology innovation over the last two years, especially around ways to make things easier and touchless for guests as we travel and restart more international travel. Although a challenge we see is if many countries have their own systems and they're not talking to each other. I think we will see a lot of innovation around integration globally and streamlined ways to address these challenges and make it easier to navigate between countries.

Women are more comfortable asking for help if there are things they don't understand, and this shouldn't be seen as a weakness, but as a strength of a good leader.

How do you motivate your executive leadership team to get buy-in for new technology systems/solutions?

We're still an early-stage startup so it's important that we focus on communication and collaboration. I attended a great leadership strategy session recently and there were some fantastic nuggets from the executive team that led the session. It stood out that it's important to be surrounded by good people and always keep the lines of communication open. This leads to the team being on the same page and makes it easier to get the buy-in when you need to implement new technology and solutions. When there are few surprises you often come to the conclusion together quickly for the new technology buy-in!

How have you dealt with the challenge of managing your technology road map in the current COVID-impacted environment?

COVID-19 was challenging for us. We're a new travel company that was just starting to build its technology when COVID impacted our industry, shutting everything down. Sadly that included much of the travel technology teams we were working with as they laid people off and downsized to adjust to the lack of revenue. This delayed our technology, road mapping, and connections we needed to build and launch the new product. Hotel partners closing or going on extended leave unaware of the future and what to expect added to the challenge because we couldn't reach who we needed for our connections. On a positive note, however, it gave us time to discover much of the tech we needed to accomplish was to build it ourselves. This gave us a solid road map for our future as travel begins to recover and return to normal.

How are you promoting diversity in the tech leadership space?

I grew up living in multiple countries and embrace and respect all cultures, people and traditions. There's so much we can learn from each other and working together with team members around the world allows us to continue to promote a diverse culture both in tech and across the company.





MARTHA POULTER

CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER
ROYAL CARIBBEAN

Have you had mentors as you've grown in your career? What role has mentorship played in your career? Are you a mentor to others?

I believe mentorship and learning from others is critical to any leader's successful journey and I've been fortunate to benefit from mentorship at various stages of my career. Early in my career, mentors were helpful in learning how to handle influencing and difficult interactions. Mid-career mentors helped me to navigate the entrance into management of others. Later in my career, mentors became sponsors who were the ones speaking about my potential when I wasn't present in the room. I've continued that idea of mentorship for those that are seeking it, as well as in everyday micro-interactions.

What has your experience been like being a female leader in a male-dominated field (technology)?

It's a tough question to answer because I don't know how else to compare my experience. I've learned a few things that have served me well.

1. Differences can always be leveraged as a strength. Therefore, you don't have to pretend to be like everyone else, but rather be authentic and contribute from your vantage point.
2. It's important to understand how your differences might be perceived or received by various constituents in order to be most effective. Do your stakeholder analysis and plan accordingly.
3. Finding common ground isn't always as hard as it appears from the perspective of gender differences. As technologists or technology leaders, we're typically working on common problems and that can be a great point of connection to build relationships.

What's a career achievement that you're most proud of? Why?

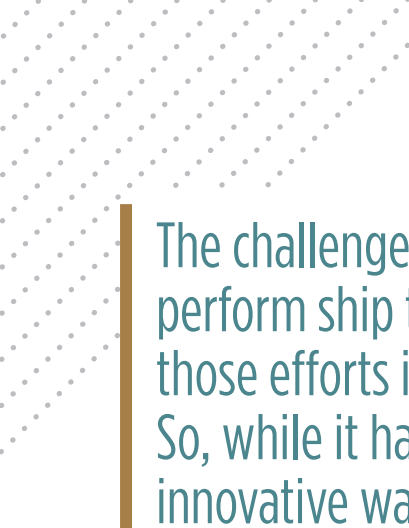
I'm most proud of what I call achieving "AND." I'm very technical AND able to convey those topics to business leaders in a way that matters to them. I've navigated difficult environments like the financial crisis and pandemic AND delivered business value with capacity limitations. I've advanced to executive ranks of several companies AND equally focused on family, self and community. For me, achieving the combination of complex situations is very fulfilling.

Is there an example of you taking a major risk in your career? How did it turn out for you?

I transitioned from a business CIO role into a corporate transformation role as an individual contributor. It was risky in the sense that it was a lateral move responsible for delivering a lot of change via influence and without a directly controlled team. It taught me a lot about change management, creating a shared vision, and balancing urgency with patience. In the end, the transformation work was delivered successfully and I was promoted into a dual business CIO and quality leader role.

Can you tell us about a recent successful technology rollout at your company, and your role in that project?

Over the last 18 months, our company has had to pivot to operationalize a whole series of solutions resulting from the global pandemic, ranging from crew requirements to future cruise credits to medical solutions. All these solutions had several common characteristics. They required speed to market, requirements were iterative as the pandemic evolved, and often the first technology solution in that process area. Our teams were terrific about agile development/deployment and doing so in a completely remote approach. Not only were our technology teams remote, but also our method for deploying solutions to the fleet was also virtual, which was definitely a first. I'm hugely proud of how we brought these solutions to market, which were pivotal in our return to service.



The challenges of the industry closure forced us to reinvent how we perform ship technology upgrades remotely and to accelerate those efforts in order to minimize the impact when guests returned. So, while it has been an incredibly challenging time, we've also found innovative ways to accomplish a lot.

How do you foresee your company's technology budget shifting for the remainder of 2021 and into 2022?

As our business continues to rebound, our investment appetite will rebound as well. We have no shortage of great ideas where technology can play an important role and are excited to continue to deliver those solutions for Royal Caribbean Group, whether it's in hotel operations, food and beverage services, or our distribution channels.

What are the technology trends you're watching closely right now that you believe will have a big impact on the travel and hospitality industry in 2022?

Since our ships aren't hard wire connected, we've been working closely with partners and various solutions providers to track innovations in the areas of ship connectivity. Two that are of interest to us are the evolution of satellite communication and our ability to "hold" cloud transactions if we lose connectivity. Satellite is exploding not just in terms of new market entrants, but also in their approach to the technology. These satellite connectivity innovation areas are compelling as they improve speed, cost and coverage. On the cloud transaction side, we would like to optimize our shipboard cloud usage, which is a constraint today using satellite connectivity. There are cloud edge solutions that are emerging which are promising in our potential ability to transact locally and hold the transaction in a queue or cache until connectivity is re-established.

How do you motivate your executive leadership team to get buy-in for new technology systems/solutions?

Influencing for any new solution starts with a strong understanding and ability to explain the business problem that we're trying to solve in business terms and not just in tech terms. Where possible, having solid data that can quantify the existing gaps or the desired improvement outcomes is a helpful tool to compel action.

How have you dealt with the challenge of managing your technology road map in the current COVID-impacted environment?

As you know, the cruise industry was severely impacted by the pandemic and that meant completely rethinking our road map priorities. We deferred some priorities, we continued others on a revised pace, and it might surprise you to know we accelerated other priorities. The challenges of the industry closure forced us to reinvent how we perform ship technology upgrades remotely and to accelerate those efforts in order to minimize the impact when guests returned. So, while it has been an incredibly challenging time, we've also found innovative ways to accomplish a lot.

How are you promoting diversity in the tech leadership space?

To ensure diverse leadership, we work constantly on filling our pipeline with the best talent keeping mindful attention on diversity. We have a great employee base at Royal Caribbean Group of ethnic diversity given the geographies in which we operate. As we think about how to evolve the talent pipeline with skills for the future, we engage in university recruiting at diverse institutions, we attend events like the Grace Hopper conference to connect with great female talent, and we leverage the power of our employees' network who are our best company ambassadors. I've found that following multiple strategies usually delivers the most effective outcome.



LALLI VARADH

DIRECTOR, SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT
BOOKING.COM

What inspired you to pursue a career in technology?

It all started with my mom at home. She would fix any electronic items that didn't work. And to top it off, she would encourage us to explore and do things that make us "tick." For me it was taking things apart and putting them back together. I loved to create models using clay and paper, and sell them to my mates. This curiosity morphed into a love of math and science as these things fascinated me. Also, during my early school years, I watched my dad relentlessly pursuing his goal towards his doctoral degree while working full time in the university. My innate interest in logically discovering the unknowns and creating/building/innovating new things made me choose the field of engineering.

Since then, I've always focused on how I can best use technology and my time and energy in servicing the greater good. This came about through building technology that not only enables a positive impact on society, but innovates it. Furthermore, I found a love of teaching while in university which I believe ignited my drive towards growing others. I believe the culmination of my life experiences and the opportunities to employ technology to innovate in business is why I chose to pursue a career in technology and the longevity of the same.

What is an obstacle you overcame in your career?

It might sound cliché, but I've always considered obstacles to be undiscovered opportunities that offer the chance for growth. When I moved to the U.S. (first female in my hometown to travel abroad for studies) it was extremely tough to assimilate, but I refused to feel defeated, and the opportunities that I unlocked for myself were plentiful! This all happened because I was able to step out of my comfort zone, adapt to the change, make new friends — the learnings and life experiences I wouldn't trade for anything.

I take this mindset with me throughout life. Instead of dwelling on what isn't going as planned, I make room for the unexpected and embrace those opportunities. During my early career, my biggest challenge was that I wouldn't share my perspective unless I felt very confident, which meant very rarely I would give myself a chance to use my seat at the table. I was fortunate enough to have mentors whom I could openly speak with and who encouraged me to challenge myself. Once I started to share my thoughts on a topic, people listened and I was able to see my progress towards owning my seat at the table. I share this learning experience with my teams and mentees, and encourage them to speak up and own it!

What are you doing to help get more women into technology positions, including leadership roles?

I've always believed in investing in future generations, both personally and professionally. I strongly believe that women should be introduced to technology from an early age. I've actively participated in numerous nonprofits that enable young women to explore and grow their interest in technology. Being an active leader in girls, boys and venture Scouts for a number of years, I know how programs like STEM can introduce kids and help them explore, learn and feel (through experiments and field study) technology during their early years. I've also been an advocate for initiatives that bring women into organizations early in their careers, such as internships and graduate programs.

As a leader, I've purposely advocated for women in the company, sponsoring them and encouraging them to grow into technical contributors and leaders. For new leaders, sometimes taking that leap can feel like a risky step, but having an ally who can coach you can dramatically help build the confidence to take that chance. Once they're in those positions, I do my best to continue to mentor other women to help them grow in their careers. I've found it so important to encourage women to highlight their achievements to make sure that they're getting credit/reward for their work. I hope to continue to help the next generation of women become leaders in technology.

What advice do you have for other women that might be considering a career in technology?

If you're curious about technology and passionate about exploring it, then you should jump in feet first! When I mentor young adults, I hear a lot about how they want to pursue certain career paths to make change. I believe technology is an amazing field to make a lasting impact. It's the basis for any field, so exploring various technologies much earlier in your



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life actually increases your options to work in any field, such as medicine, law, engineering, data, etc. Selecting a field is just a starting point — throughout the process you should embrace challenges and use them to grow, all while continuing to showcase your abilities and talents. And please don't discount the soft skills that you will develop — they're crucial for both your professional and personal life. From my own journey, I know that passion, continuous learning and strong work ethic can allow you to have a fulfilling career in technology.

What's a future goal/career aspiration?

I love to travel and work with people from different backgrounds because I'm curious to learn about how various businesses and cultures use technology to transform, innovate and deliver an awesome experience. Personally, it's never about a specific role or industry, it's where I see a mutual fit with aligned vision. This enables me to best lead in service to the people and business, and continue to grow the next generation. In the future, I want to lead a global nonprofit organization that serves global communities.

How is your company using technology to help solve internal and external pain points?

During these unprecedented times, communication has been crucial to ensure close collaboration amongst our colleagues and to keep employees and customers informed. We've implemented various technologies to increase efficiency and

productivity. When COVID hit and travel plans came to a halt, we used technology to quickly improve the flexibility for our customers, allowing them to modify their existing trips. This took an enormous amount of pressure off customer service and put control back into the hands of our users to reschedule their trips. To best help serve our partners, we've used technology to provide them with data insights to best set up their business for this new era in travel. Throughout this process, communication, collaboration and effective use of data to drive decisions were the key factors.

What are some of the emerging technologies that you believe will have the biggest impact on the industry in the next 12 months?

I believe that AI with the combination of advanced data analytics technologies will set the travel industry towards a deeper understanding of travellers and provide more personalized services. With the pandemic, there's a huge shift in travellers' mindsets, with more focus on flexibility, hygiene, security, health and safety. Hence, I also believe that contactless technologies will play a major role as it would bring in peace of mind and seamless experience to travellers. Customer expectations around touch-of-a-button check-in, digital health passports, Blockchain-powered accelerators for travel loyalty, flexibility to change travel plans with low to no-touch and minimum cost, etc., would continue to drive innovation, thereby improving the travel experience. In a nutshell, technologies will advance to provide a curated, personalized, thoughtful and awesome experience for travellers.

Has the timeline for purchasing and implementing technology at your organization sped up or changed due to COVID?

It has sped it up for sure. As the landscape of travel has constantly been changing throughout the past 18 months, we've needed to implement technologies at a much faster pace than in more predictable times. The needs of travellers have changed, not to mention the day-to-day changes in regulations and requirements. It has forced us to move quicker and to adapt to pivoting and re-evaluating priorities on a more frequent basis. It also has accelerated the adoption of new technologies such as cloud services



PETRA VASKOVYCH

CHIEF PRODUCT OFFICER
KIWI.COM

What inspired you to pursue a career in technology?

When I was young I was interested in plenty of things. At school I liked almost all the subjects, and it was hard for me to decide on what area to focus and which field to follow for my studies. Eventually, I chose International Relations and Political Science.

When studying, I was working for a small tech startup and found myself drawn towards technology. After some time it became clear to me that this is where I want to focus my career. The owners of the company I was working at decided to sell one of their projects to Skypicker, which today is known globally as Kiwi.com.

What's an obstacle you overcame in your career?

When we started building Kiwi.com, we didn't have any idea how successful the company would become. We tested a couple of approaches before we found our business model and focus. We were mainly trying something, failing, learning from it, and starting again with a better plan.

We were all doing anything that was needed, but as time flew by, we realized that you simply can't learn everything fast and that you need to get more experienced people on board and to start building teams.

When looking into the future and into what you want to build, you need to come across a clear set of skills you need on your team. Some of them you build, and we make sure to support that, while others just need to be added by bringing people in.

The company was growing so fast and so massively, and always making sure we had the right support for what was needed was very challenging, but we learned a lot on the way.

What are you doing to help get more women into technology positions, including leadership roles?

Kiwi.com has always, and still is, focused on embracing talent rather than on gender or background or anything else. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, we were organizing Women in Tech conferences, and we hope that once the situation stabilizes, there will be the opportunity to do it again.

Personally, I'm active in the female tech community, and one of the Femme Palette's mentors — a platform that helps women excel in their careers by matching them with a mentor and having one-to-one sessions.

What advice do you have for other women that might be considering a career in technology?

First of all, and most importantly, is to never underestimate yourself. If you're passionate about it, there's nothing that can stop you. I would also advise connecting with people in your chosen field to get a better understanding of the subject and what different roles are responsible for. There are plenty of opportunities and each of them requires a different set of skills.

In addition to that, join online and offline tech communities. There are communities that are focused specifically for women in the tech sector and they're always happy to support any newcomer.

Lastly, keep an eye on job openings and check for possible job experience (e.g., internship) with a company. Build your knowledge and skills, and the doors will open for you!

What is a future goal/career aspiration?

I love Kiwi.com and the product it offers to customers. There's an exciting journey ahead of us and I certainly want to be a part of this trip.

Regarding my personal career goal as a manager, I'm a big believer that my team can do so much better than me and I fully enjoy making my team more successful. I absolutely love to be surrounded by people who believe in the same principle.

I'm always up for new challenges and knowledge, exploring new things and opportunities. It's a necessity for me to work somewhere where I can see my work having an impact and purpose and actually making a difference. I don't dwell on titles. I'm a big believer in learning, challenging myself, and growing my mindset. This is what I want to keep up to in the future.

How is your company using technology to help solve internal and external pain points?

We believe everyone should be free to experience the world. For us, there's no greater freedom than choosing where you want to be and how you want to get there. That's why we're breaking down the barriers to low-cost travel, making the world open and accessible for all.

Thanks to our unique Kiwi-Code, we find cheap travel options other search tools can't see so our customers will never have that nagging doubt they've missed out on a better deal elsewhere.

It's a necessity for me to work somewhere where I can see my work having an impact and purpose and actually making a difference. I don't dwell on titles. I'm a big believer in learning, challenging myself, and growing my mindset.

We pride ourselves on our independence and drive to challenge the rigid system of airlines and carriers in the best interests of our customers. As tech innovators, we're creating solutions to make affordable travel available to everyone.

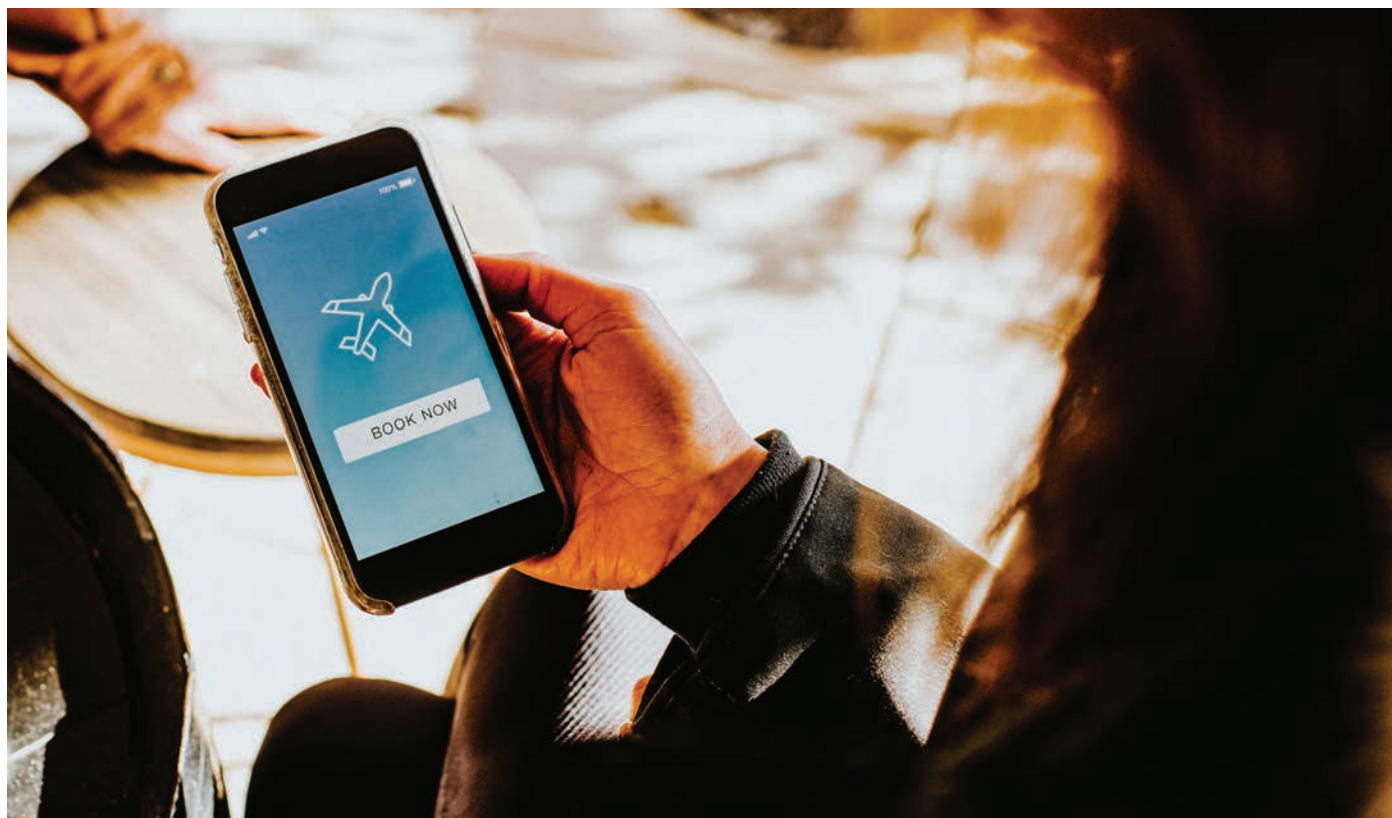
What are some of the emerging technologies that you believe will have the biggest impact on the industry in the next 12 months?

Where I see the biggest impact and potential is within the evolution of data platforms, and further into the future, their ability to make decisions for the business.

Has the timeline for purchasing and implementing technology at your organization sped up or changed due to COVID?

Of course we had to shift the focus very fast to make sure we reflected on what was happening in the world. The habits and priorities of our customers changed from one day to another: travelers are looking to book last-minute, they want to travel for shorter periods of time, being more flexible, and many other changes. This brought challenges as it was a lot of work to try keeping up with the pace and reflect the needs of customers and at the same time opportunities for us to upgrade our product and make it serve our customers best.

The whole Kiwi.com team did such a great job, showing incredible support and dedication. It makes me proud to be a part of something this great.





WHO WE ARE



Acxiom is a customer intelligence company that provides data-driven solutions to enable the world's best marketers to better understand their customers to create better experiences and business growth. A leader in [customer data management](#), [identity](#), and the [ethical use of data](#) for more than 50 years, Acxiom now helps thousands of clients and partners around the globe work together to create millions of better customer experiences, every day. Acxiom is a registered trademark of Acxiom LLC and is part of The Interpublic Group of Companies (IPG). For more information, visit [Acxiom.com](https://www.acxiom.com).



Women Leading Travel & Hospitality is a membership-based association that connects executive women across all sectors of the travel and hospitality industry. Its mission is to unite, inspire and empower its community of executive women leaders by providing unparalleled resources, support and motivation to achieve personal and professional growth. For more information, visit [womenleadingtravelandhospitality.com](https://www.womenleadingtravelandhospitality.com).



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