

# TFWA President calls for unity in post-pandemic era



TFWA President Jaya Singh

Opening the 36th TFWA World Exhibition & Conference on October 25, TFWA President Jaya Singh has emphasized the importance of the industry working together and developing stronger business relationships during one of the most challenging periods in its history.

“The last few months have convinced me that coming together and uniting as an industry is the surest way for duty free and travel retail to emerge from the current crisis. No single person, no one company has all the answers, but by closer collaboration, talking to each other and harnessing our collective efforts, we can remake our business for the post-pandemic era.”

However, Singh also warned against complacency and falling back into old ways of thinking. He urged delegates to heed the words of Eugene Barry of Dubai Airports and “look beyond the airport retail box to changing attitudes and behaviors – don’t assume that everything in 2022 will be the same as 2019”.

Singh continued: “International travel has changed, and so have traveler expectations. To satisfy those, we shall have to be more agile and responsive, providing memorable experiences that are accessible across multiple channels, tailored to individual tastes by effective marketing based on shared traveler data. We must offer something exclusive that can’t be found outside travel retail, and we must do all of this in a framework that prioritizes sustainability and social equity.”

## Adapting to the new landscape

While praising the industry’s work in weathering the storm of the pandemic, Singh said discipline would be key in order to maintain this momentum in the coming months. He added that, pre-pandemic, travel retail had often been guilty of appearing out of touch, with strong passenger growth masking “haphazard planning and questionable investment decisions”.

He continued: “We weren’t good at converting travelers into shoppers, and even when we managed to do so, spend per head was stagnating or in decline. Today we have fewer travelers overall, but conversion and spend rates are higher and still rising. If we can retain this discipline post-Covid, when

people start to travel in numbers again, we shall all be winners.”

Singh also called on businesses to provide greater access to traveler data and insight, something he believes will be crucial for the future success of the industry: “Until now, our industry’s record of sharing such data has been less than impressive. Companies have been reluctant to reveal information they regard as commercially sensitive to those they trade with. Yet this is the very moment when our industry has the most to gain from a clearer understanding of traveler needs and how they’ve changed since 2019.

“Now is the time for brands, retailers and landlords to build on the relationships forged in adversity during the darkest days of Covid-19. By pooling our knowledge of the post-pandemic traveler, we all stand to gain, developing products and brands that will appeal to these new shoppers, tailoring the retail offer to their revised aspirations and creating a fresh sense of excitement as people begin to cross borders again.”

### Supporting a stronger industry

With the return of TFWA World Exhibition & Conference as a physical event, Singh said he hoped the week would create a space in which insightful conversations would be shared and the spirit of co-operation would be strengthened in order to power the travel retail industry’s recovery. “Our mission at TFWA is to provide a business platform for the global duty free and travel retail industry to prosper. This week in Cannes is a central plank of that platform.”

Beyond Cannes, Singh said TFWA would provide further opportunities to bring the trade together at the upcoming MEADFA Conference, taking place in Dubai from November 21 to 23. He added that plans for next year’s TFWA Asia Pacific Exhibition & Conference – the association’s first event in Asia Pacific since 2019 – were “progressing well”.

He also described the return of the Duty Free World Council Academy in partnership with ACI as “excellent news because customer-facing skills will be essential as travelers return”.

Concluding his speech, Singh repeated his thanks for all those who had managed to visit Cannes for TFWA World Exhibition & Conference: “Apart from giving us the pleasure of finally meeting again face-to-face, your presence over the next few days will provide a vital opportunity for our industry to reconnect, exchange viewpoints and shape the recovery. It’s an opportunity we must all seize with both hands.”