

Will zoom calls replace business jet travel?

by Lorna Titley

With Zoom and its competitors enjoying something of an extended “moment” during the past year, as videoconferencing and webinars replace in person meetings and conferences, you may be forgiven for thinking that such platforms have always been here, so ubiquitous have they become during the COVID-19 Pandemic. While recognising the lifeline Zoom, Google Meet and other apps have offered for remote workers, there are inherent limits to what they can offer in terms of replicating real life experiences.

So, as parts of the world start to emerge from lockdown, will executives return to business travel – and in particular to private aviation – at the same levels they enjoyed pre-pandemic? Or will organisations see the cost savings offered by conducting meetings online and move to curtail executive travel?

On 2nd June, Quaynote`s half-day virtual conference, **“Zoom versus Business Jets”** will debate the attractions - and limitations – of doing business in a videoconferencing app as opposed to hopping onto a private plane to meet important clients face-to-face.

In the build-up to Zoom versus Business Jets, we asked conference presenters for their views. For Tom Chatfield, CEO, whose company Camber Aviation is officially supporting Quaynote`s conference, business is best done in person. “Collaborating on new projects, building partnerships and creating business opportunities begins with a conversation. Video conferencing allowed us all to communicate and continue to do business during over a year of lockdowns,” acknowledges Chatfield, “but I am convinced that business is best done “live”. This is how solid relationships and trust are built.”

Michael Farley, CEO & Founder at Outlier Jets agrees that in person travel will continue in the future, especially at the executive level. Recognizing that actually owning a jet is not appropriate for everyone, his company analyzes individual client`s travel needs to assess the best solution. “Sometimes the

right solution is the occasional charter while other times the Outlier Jet Card or aircraft acquisition may be the most suitable answer,” explains Farley.

Some of those we spoke to believe that zoom works well for some types of meetings, but not for others. Tim Callies, an aircraft designer at Callies Grafe Design reports that his company has successfully met with clients and contacts over zoom during the pandemic. He does however draw a distinction when it comes to first meetings between the designer and client. “Especially when it comes to presenting the emotional, artistic part of the design (sketches, materials, shapes), we believe that a direct meeting is indispensable. Moreover, at a dinner together, it is not only the professional aspect that counts, but also the more personal, private aspect,” explains Callies.

There was some acknowledgement that the ability to cut costs might drive organisations to reduce business travel in the future and replace it with more videoconferencing. A more specific concern for the business aviation industry, however, is to do with the environment. “COVID has shone a spotlight on the role business travel plays in climate change,” says Toby Edwards, co-CEO at Victor. He continues, “So the trend may change but not because of video conferencing, rather because responsible businesses will avoid unnecessary travel in the future.” In other words, businesses are more likely to reduce their travel as a result of the environmental impact of flying, than due to cost considerations alone. Tim Callies also believes that what he calls the “Great Thunberg Movement” has helped to create sensitivity regarding the environment. “Corporations are keen to use environmental protection as a “trademark” towards their customers,” he notes.

Interestingly, organizers of leading events that serve the business aviation industry have seen their audiences double or even triple during the pandemic. “The virtual audiences we’ve created during the pandemic are significantly larger than the days when we just had in person meetings / events,” confirms Jeffery Lowe, CEO at Asian Sky Media. He points to concerns about health & safety, cost savings and higher efficiency as factors that continue to drive the trend for online shows and conferences.

So, do the advantages afforded by meeting clients and other key contacts personally far outweigh the costs? “Absolutely not. 2020 saw the best business jet transaction levels in at least three years,” asserts Lowe. “And all achieved despite a pandemic, with its quarantines, lock downs, travel

restrictions, you name it. We all found ways to still connect with people and get business done.”

When all is said and done, however, there`s no denying that international travel opens up possibilities and creates experiences that are not possible via zoom. “Video conferencing is great to continue to build business relationships, but are a poor replacement for vacations,” points out Tom Chatfield. “Who wants to visit the Maldives, Italy or Jamaica virtually? There was lots of time to do that during lockdown – now people want to travel, to get out into the world and rediscover the joys of travel.” [Ends]

*How effective have zoom and other video conferencing apps been in replacing meetings or business travel in your organisation during the pandemic? Will your company continue to scale back business travel post-pandemic and rely more on virtual meetings (as a means of saving time or costs)? Or does your corporation believe that the advantages of meeting clients in person outweighs the costs? **Join our interactive debate at Zoom Calls versus Business Jets, the online conference, taking place this Wednesday, 2 June.***