



TCR shares how it has embraced the Covid climate as an opportunity to enhance operations. Felicity Stredder brings the update.

Like everyone in the aviation sector, GSE solutions provider TCR felt the effects of the pandemic. According to TCR's APAC Managing Director, Jason Watson, who was brought in six years ago to help lead TCR into the Asia Pacific region, the company's operations across Malaysia, Australia, New Zealand and – since June – Singapore, have used the Covid hiatus to improve operational efficiencies and return stronger than ever.

Investing in the team

Owing to the geographic spread of the initial wave, the pandemic hit TCR's APAC operations first. Watson's team quickly took steps to optimise the business, beginning with its people. "The first phase of investing in our team as we built back out of this crisis, and something that was really important through our first six to 12 months, was a big focus on making sure we looked after our team. Not just safety – we also put a big emphasis on our mental health across the entire team. We increased the employee assistance programmes to enable access to counselling, we got the teams engaged in mental health charity fundraisers, we had morning teas. We wanted to promote this idea of caring about each other knowing

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how dark the times were going to be ahead of us," says Watson.

The virus situation soon reached the point when working from home became the norm. In Australia and New Zealand, the disruption was less pronounced because the virus was contained more efficiently than in other areas, for example in Malaysia, where TCR staff are still home-working. While business was at a lull operationally, TCR reallocated resources into keeping staff engaged, growing and learning. "We've made sure that we provided all the staff, even those who were stood down or those who found other the jobs, with access to online training platforms. We used LinkedIn training platforms for white collars, we worked with the GSE OEMs to get access to their training platforms for our technicians and we held sessions twice a week with our operations leaders, who would walk the people at home through how to use the platforms." ▶



As they began to emerge from the pandemic, more in-person training has also been made available where possible. “We’ve really accelerated, with the help of the government, our apprenticeship programme, so we’ve got a whole wave of new apprentices that have come into the business, which is great for the culture as well. We’ve also put in place more formalisation around further education in our business. We wanted to show the people who went through the darkest times with us that we want them to have the brightest times in front of them. We’ve got some people doing university degrees and other people getting a higher level of technical certification external to the business. And that’s all being supported by the company.”

Accelerating digitalisation

Since the pandemic, almost every company has been forced to adopt new, remote communication methods like Zoom conferencing, which many have found to be a challenge. TCR invested time and resources to adapt to and optimise the new model of working. “Some of my managers and I took some communications classes at a well-renowned acting school. They were able to help us build a framework that we could share with our teams on how to be as effective as possible on video conferences. We made some tutorial videos and we’ve shared those through our common sharing platforms. We’ve also tried to implement things like the right lighting and we’ve made Zoom rooms for the team so they’ve got a proper environment: a quiet room with good speakers, a good camera and the right lights,” Watson explains. “We recognised the digitalisation of human communication was really important – we made that leap and we made it quickly. Teaching the team how to communicate effectively over the video was really important for us.”

Existing initiatives were also accelerated over this period, such as the digitalisation of forms and processes, and the company’s central database, called its equipment centre, where manuals for the machines are kept. The technicians can scan a QR code on the machine to bring up the service records as well as photos of the units.

They also supplemented video tutorials. “When we had more downtime, we got our best technicians to create training videos,” Watson continues. “They made some familiarisation videos, some emergency recovery videos of different GSE, and were able to load that against the assets in the equipment centre. So now they are available for every technician, when they scan the barcode on the machine.”

Electrification and carbon emissions

Watson is also the executive sponsor for the group’s Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) pillar, which measures its sustainability performance. He and his team have put a lot of energy in helping customers accelerate the electrification of their GSE fleets. “Everybody wants to go electric. No one can because there’s no charging infrastructure. So we’ve put a lot of energy into educating directly to the airports, but also into helping customers gather the information they need to go to the airport and lobby for support to get the charging infrastructure,” he explains. “We built a tool that can calculate carbon emissions across the GSE fleet. We can also easily calculate diesel consumption, which is a big number. With that tool we’re able to go to airports or customers and finally give them real numbers for their carbon emissions and their fuel usage across that fleet.”

With this data, TCR can also prove to customers that buying brand new electric equipment to replace their old fleet would actually lower their costs. “For us that was a breakthrough because customers had never had the numbers. Nor had the airports. No one had ever had the full view.

We have a very clear view of our own footprints by site and where all of our assets operate, but we also have a number of projects where we’ve been able to help our customers build a picture of their own internal carbon footprint,” he explains.

The tool is believed to be unique in its universal application across all GSE brands. TCR recently announced the first phase of an electric replacement programme for baggage tractors with dnata in Singapore, having demonstrated the direct fuel savings, cost savings and carbon emission savings they could expect using this new tool.

Meanwhile, efforts towards telematics have been made across the group as a whole. Watson notes the progress in the APAC region. “We’ve had every single asset, motorised and non-motorised, fitted with our telematics partner’s telematics, from Targa and Sensolus. And that gives us even better data to input into our carbon emission calculator, as well as enabling us to manage the fleet and get all the normal benefits of the telematics.”



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Jason Watson, TCR

Adjusting to recovery speeds

As coronavirus infection rates have spiked in waves, the aviation industry has been overwhelmed, necessitating flexibility across all aspects of airlines’ operations. “Obviously aviation activity contracted and, therefore, there’s GSE that is available. As our markets in Australia have recovered domestically, and Qantas went through a well-publicised outsourcing exercise, that’s meant there’s been a big demand to handle narrowbody aircraft. We were able to quickly mobilise our European fleet into my regional fleet to be able to support the customers because they were given a very short lead time.”

While recovery is observed, Watson identifies a trend of rationalisation of GSE fleets, including customer-owned fleets, through the disposal of old assets. “Rationalisation for us is about

resizing your fleet, getting the right fleet mix in terms of narrowbody and widebody, and not carrying excess that you don’t need anymore.

“What we’ve seen emerging in the industry is a pairing of operational demands to the cost base. And then, as the industry recovers from the crisis with a more prominent discussion around carbon emissions and investment in new assets, we bring value there as well. We’ve able to help our customers invest in the electrification of their fleets.”

Within the region, the markets continue to recover at different speeds. In Australia and New Zealand, where low infection rates have been well-publicised, domestic markets have recovered quickly. Malaysia, on the other hand, has been among those struggling the most in the region, Watson reports. The recuperating market in Australia offers a good idea of what to expect as other markets recover and offers cause for optimism, but the rollercoaster is not over yet, he feels. “I think the restart will fire in some places and not fire in others – and it’s going to be bumpy.” **ghi**