

# Sustainability Reporting, Omnichannel Experience Top CWT's Investment Priorities

Posted on March 11, 2022 by Business Editor



CWT last month pledged to launch new capabilities throughout this year after implementing a recapitalization plan that includes a \$100 million investment in product development. CWT EVP and chief technology officer John Pelant recently spoke with BTN executive editor Michael B. Baker about the travel management company's priorities for that investment, citing sustainable travel initiatives, improving connectivity and increasing content.

**BTN:** How are you determining priorities for investment?

**John Pelant:** Through the pandemic, we continued to work from both a product and technology standpoint, where we were continuing to innovate and make sure that we're creating efficiencies on the counselor side. With this new recapitalization, it gives us a larger scope in what we're able to work on.

When we talk about welfare and risk assurance, that's where it comes into sustainability. CWT has thought that's important for over a decade, but in talking with our customers and looking at the marketplace, we see sustainability increasing significantly at a rate that it hasn't in the past.

As we talk to our customers, and we poll them, an overwhelming majority are looking for a couple of things. They want their travelers to be able to have the information to make the right choices. We look at that as having those sustainability indicators at the point of sale for the traveler to have that information and make the best choice for them, the company and the environment. We are going to continue to innovate and work with partners to make sure travelers are safe around their journey. What are the events that are taking place where a traveler is, but also how do we prepare them from a health standpoint, be that from [Covid-19] or anything else, to be as safe as possible?

**BTN:** What sort of data sources are you looking at for that?

**Pelant:** When we look at point of sale, with MyCWT being the mobile delivery tool for us, we're going to continue both in '22 and '23 to put more into MyCWT. It's really about picking the right partner to be able to get that point-of-sale information to a traveler. Some of it will come through other OBTs and tools and our partners, but we have chosen a specific partner that we're working on both for point-of-sale data and the reporting data for the travel manager. You'll see that shortly.

**BTN:** What sort of reporting are you hoping to provide for travel managers?

**Pelant:** We've had reporting around sustainability for travel managers for a number of years, but the acceleration we're going to put into this on behalf of our customers will be significant. We will be bringing together several different data points, making sure we have the right indicators to provide that information. There are rating systems out of the U.K. and other areas that are really helpful. We want to bring together multiple of those to give the best information in that dashboard to the travel managers, to make sure they're able to see how their program is performing. That will be coming in the first half of this year, making sure we are enhancing that reporting, and that's something we will be very focused on for the next couple of years, making sure we keep curating and improving.

**BTN:** You mentioned a heightened interest. Has that been driven by reduced travel during the pandemic, or is it a reaction to some of the more dire climate reports that have come out lately?

**Pelant:** There's definitely a heightened awareness of the information that is out with the climate reports that are coming. But I also think that during the pandemic, travel managers took a pause, and as these programs ramp back up, they have a new, fresh view to spend, to sustainability, to these different areas and making sure that they're starting up in a correct manner. Corporations as a whole are really stepping up in what they're looking at in their sustainability program, and travel ends up being a part of that program, so there's a confluence of multiple drivers in this.

**BTN:** Have companies been asking you to help with diversity, equity and inclusion efforts as well?

**Pelant:** When we look at inclusivity and how that interacts with the overall travel program, it's very important to us. We look at ourselves in the overall world community, making sure we are doing more than our part. When we look at that, and I happen to be the cosponsor of our employee resource group for women at CWT, we've had those conversations within our company and also with our customers around how do we make sure that we are keeping different groups in different parts of that traveling population in mind. That can be when people are traveling to different locations: How can we make sure they are safe, that the appropriate information is there to be able to have that journey as you go? We look at making sure that various groups are able to use and have the applicable tool to be able to use our applications as well, and that can be certifications from a mobile standpoint or online.

We take all of that very seriously. We look at ourselves as being good, global partners for our customers. You'll see coming up later this year making sure that when we look at profiles and the information there that we are being very inclusive and looking out for our travelers and customers.

**BTN:** When you talk of wanting to improve the digital experience, what is the focus there?

**Pelant:** We look at MyCWT as that core platform. We integrate with online booking tools and many of our core partners, but our focus is going to be on that omnichannel experience. We look at that as being a seamless experience for a traveler. A traveler books online, they can talk to a traveler counselor to get that experience later. We integrate with them from a messaging standpoint when there's disruption and have a solid integration with expense on the back end. All of that, the contextual history of that data, goes flowing along with that traveler in making sure that we're able to take care of them at any point. That's what it means to us.

That digital experience is making sure the traveler can get a hold of us anytime and anywhere. That changes throughout a journey. If you're on an airplane or a loud airport, calling may not be the best, so we need to be upfront in messaging that traveler, and they can message back on a variety of platforms. If they're working in Microsoft Teams or in Facebook or whatever they use for messaging, that's important, so that will be a large focus for us, building out that digital experience in a way we feel is unique in the industry and to our customers and travelers.

**BTN:** Will it be more technology that you build internally or through partners and acquisitions?

**Pelant:** It's a combination. We believe we have in-house industry knowledge on what the strategy looks like, on how these should be built architecturally. We will definitely have in-house engineering and architecture that are going on, but we will also partner with who we believe are the best in the marketplace to bring forth the pieces and make sure we put it together. The solution itself will be unique in how we put that together. We're always open from an acquisition standpoint to look at what may make sense in the marketplace. We feel like we have a very good handle on how to build this out over the next couple of years and really put something in the market that's going to be fantastic for our customers.

**BTN:** Will you be adding personnel on the technology side, like some of your competitors are doing?

**Pelant:** We have a depth of knowledge from a combination of technologies, but we're always looking to expand the depth of that knowledge. We will do that appropriately as we grow and build out that technology skillset as we need. There's definitely room for us to grow from a technology standpoint. The other area to touch on along that MyCWT growth trajectory in the overall ecosystem is the success we've had already around MyCWT in China. That's a platform we built out just prior to the pandemic, and it has really gained traction as that market has ramped back up from a travel standpoint. We've had some significant success there and are building that out as well for our overall platform.

**BTN:** What are you looking to add on the content side?

**Pelant:** That can be anything from how we're building out the programs around [New Distribution Capability] and making sure the right content is there as well as expanding how we integrate with various OBTs in the marketplace, what we're looking to do is be sure we bring the right and best content to our customers. Some of that can be reacting to what happens in the marketplace, and some of that can be leading in what we bring to our customers. That will be a continued expansion of what we look at. We still feel very strongly about the investments we made in RoomIt for our hotel solutions for our customers, and we'll continue to bring great content to our customers on the hotel side as well. Those pieces come together in what we're doing from a content aggregation side.

[www.businesstravelnews.com](http://www.businesstravelnews.com)

