



# RE-IMAGINING THE GUEST JOURNEY IN THE AGE OF COVID-19



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# INTRODUCTION

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The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly impacted the global economy, with significant impacts on the travel and tourism industry. A travel sentiment study conducted by Longwoods International and Miles Partnership revealed that 79% of travelers will change their travel plans in the next six months due to COVID-19. 63%

of travelers plan to make their next trip by car, with only 27% planning to get on a plane in the next six months.

These numbers showcase the increased hesitancy of many around the world to venture back out to places where crowds could cause health and safety concerns. In light of this, parks and

attractions around the world are adapting to the “new normal,” changing the way they operate and communicate with both the general public and their most loyal guests. It’s more imperative than ever for operators to adapt to the redefined needs and expectations of their guests, making public safety a top priority while maintaining a high regard for the guest experience.

From their first touch point with your brand – on your website and eCommerce platform – to the moment they step off your property and begin their trip home, guests will expect a more in-depth level of interaction with park operators that provides reassurance that their safety and satisfaction are top priority. While it goes without saying that these changes will impact the typical guest journey, there are steps attraction operators can take to ensure a smooth transition process that allows guests to safely experience their favorite thrills and attractions once again.





# BEFORE VISITING AN ATTRACTION

## *The Importance of Digital Presence & Guest Engagement*

Now more than ever, it's crucial that your online presence be user-friendly, easy to understand and ready to deliver on guest expectations.



Communicating with guests prior to arrival, whether through your website or a mobile app, will help to build their confidence and set expectations for their park visit.

Since 2014, we have seen that desktop experiences are no longer the primary area of focus for most online shoppers. More and more customers prefer to complete transactions on a mobile device; therefore, successful eCommerce ticketing strategies must prioritize optimization for mobile users.

In 2019, almost 60% of online ticket sales made via our **accesso Passport**® online ticketing system came through mobile devices.

## *Communicating Safety Measures*

A Goodway Group Report<sup>(1)</sup> shows that consumers' top concern is venue cleanliness and sanitation.

From an operator standpoint, we know that consumer safety is top of mind – and reminding your guests of the many ways you are working to keep them safe can make all the difference. You can accomplish this by clearly outlining the safety protocols and operational procedures you're implementing, with clear direction so guests understand how to do their part.

Most guests – no matter how loyal – will be reluctant to return if operators don't have effective and clearly communicated safety measures in place. Some of these measures may include wiping down all points of contact with appropriate cleansers, using sneeze guards, or having plenty of areas for hand washing or sanitizing throughout the park.

Furthermore, technology like UV light disinfectant systems can be used with your hardware (such as payment terminals and touchscreens) to allow guests to safely purchase items and complete waivers. These systems can be run on automated disinfecting cycles and can be motion-activated.

From the guest perspective, communicating safety measures also prepares them for what to expect when they finally walk through your gates again after reopening. They'll already know things like how you've implemented physical distancing, whether they'll be required to wear a mask and if/how you will take their temperature upon entrance to the attraction.



1. [How COVID-19 is Impacting Theme Parks](#)



# Sell Everything Online

As guests may be hesitant about in-person box offices and the exchange of physical cash, it's more important than ever for operators to optimize their eCommerce platform and encourage advance ticket sales and reservations by pass holders.

In addition to easing guest concerns, online ticketing alleviates the operator's concern over managing box office queues and ensuring the safety of their front line staff. Take the opportunity to expand your online storefront and

give your guests the chance to purchase anything they might need to enjoy a memorable visit, such as parking, souvenirs or meal deals.

With the right technology – like [our award-winning accesso Passport ticketing suite](#) – operators can sell practically anything online, boosting the exposure of a limitless variety of items that may have previously only been available onsite: parking, cabana rental, meal packages, retail items, photo packages – the possibilities are endless.

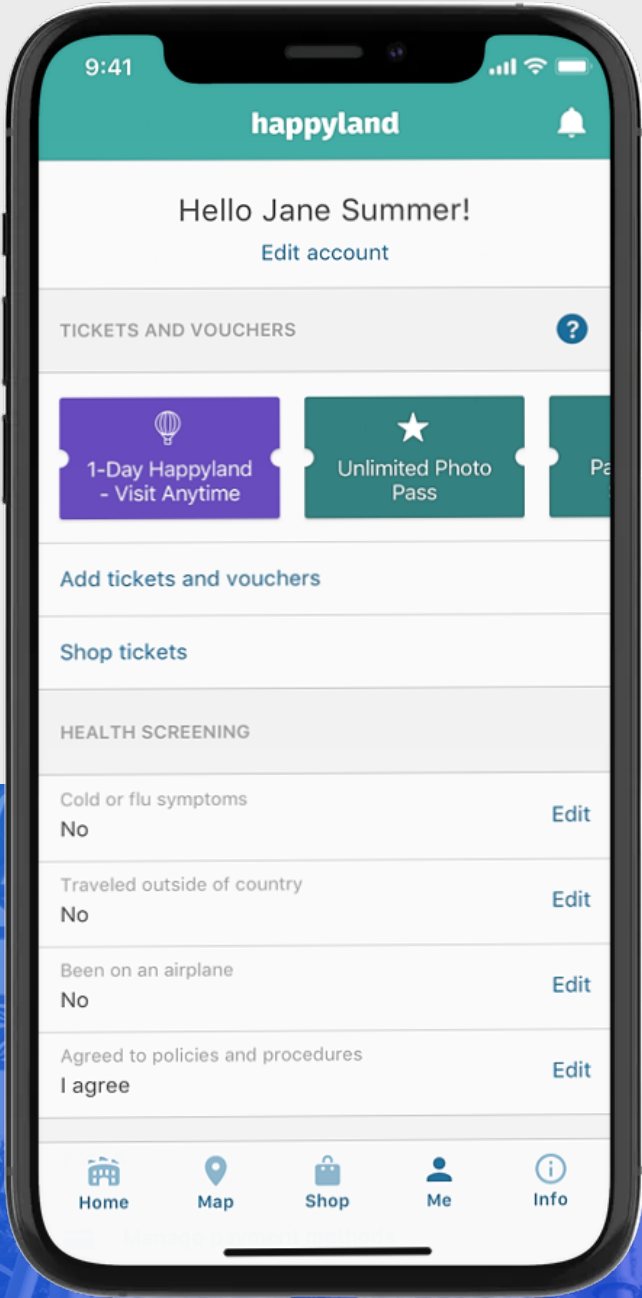
Not only will this help your guests enjoy a more seamless experience, but your venue may also be able to [make up for lost revenue by cross-selling and up-selling items](#).



# Collecting Guest Information in Advance

Depending on your locale, you may need to collect information from guests in order to comply with health regulations. Simplify the process by allowing your guests to complete paperwork, health checks and waivers before arrival. Make sure you're using a digital waiver system so that guests do not have to fill out a physical form when they arrive.

This will give you an opportunity to capture key data about your guests, including emergency contact information, health stats and opt-in for contact tracing. If you have a mobile app, make sure you have this functionality available for a seamless experience.





# THE IN-PARK EXPERIENCE

As theme parks across the world have started releasing their respective reopening guidelines, it's apparent physical distancing will play a large role in the parks and attractions industry for some time.

59% of consumers are worried about entering crowds and what the potential contact with

strangers could mean for their health<sup>(1)</sup>. In a world where "six feet apart" has become the new normal, ensuring the safety of your guests and staff is vital. The following six steps can help as you begin to construct your new operational plan.



### SELL ONLINE

Consumers are becoming more risk-averse as we adapt our daily lives to the pandemic, and ticket purchase lines may soon become a relic of the past.

It's ethically responsible to help minimize the risk of standing in lines by offering your guests a contactless alternative to purchasing their ticket and preparing for their visit. With the pandemic resulting in 10 million new online shoppers<sup>(2)</sup> (from a variety of age groups) in the United States alone, it's also just good business sense.



### LIMIT CAPACITY

One of the many ways physical distancing can be implemented is through limiting and managing capacity. IAAPA has released suggested industry guidelines to help theme park and attractions operators determine a safe reopening capacity for guests.

It is important to consider guidelines that are appropriate for the unique layout and operations of each park, and to remember that physical distancing is not only about keeping guests safe, but also important for protecting employees.

In order to accurately manage capacity, operators must manage the number of people walking through the front gates while also monitoring the real-time flow of guests leaving the venue. Utilizing technology to solve these concerns can help you achieve attendance projections and revenue goals without overcrowding your venue.



### STAGGER ARRIVALS

To comply with physical distancing guidelines and avoid unnecessary crowds, operators may need to stagger guests' arrival to the venue. This is most easily done by setting an arrival time for each guest as they purchase tickets online.

Leveraging ticketing technology that allows for time-specific pricing or ticket reservations will place you in the driver's seat of attendance volume control.



### ELIMINATE LINES

Once guests are inside the gates, queues take center stage when it comes to physical distancing. Since all guests will likely be expected to stand 6 feet apart for some time to come, continuing to operate lines as they were before COVID-19 will be all but impossible. Fortunately, solutions to address this challenge are readily available and, as attractions adapt their operations, virtual queuing can help prevent overcrowding of ride queues.

From a guest experience standpoint, the use of virtual queuing allows guests to experience more of the park, exploring areas they may not have otherwise if they were waiting in line. This not only allows for a better guest experience, but also the potential for boosted revenue by way of increased retail and food and beverage sales.



### GO CONTACTLESS

In a COVID-19 world, guests will be wary of high-touch surfaces and close face-to-face interaction with employees. Fingerprint scanners and other high-touch surfaces are likely to become a thing of the past.

Instead, guests will expect contactless solutions that allow them to enter the park without the risk of surface contamination or unnecessary face-to-face interaction. They will expect the same once inside the theme park, venue or attraction.

Whether you deliver these solutions by offering payment processing with the option to tap-to-pay, use Apple Wallet, or make payment via a wearable like **accesso Prism**, a wallet-free experience is a great way to enhance the guest experience.



### OFFER MOBILE F&B

Outside of the tourism and travel industry, we've seen a sweeping move toward food delivery and curbside pickup. Services once seen as innovative have now become part of daily life for many consumers. As such, guests are visiting theme parks, venues and attractions with higher expectations for food and beverage service.

Operators will be expected to provide a means for guests to order food ahead, pick it up and benefit from contactless payment solutions. In dine-in scenarios, facilitating physical distancing will be essential for the safety of your guests and team. Operators can achieve this through staggered seating maps and reservation times.

Utilizing the right technology allows guests to experience all the F&B offerings a theme park or attraction has to offer, including pre-ordering and all-in-one mobile wallet capabilities, all from their smartphone.

1. [How COVID-19 is Impacting Theme Parks](#) 2. [The Great Reluctance](#)



# DESIGNING THE GUEST EXPERIENCE

Guest experience management technology can play a key role in ensuring a safe, fun environment for each guest within the park. Leveraging such technology, like [The Experience Engine™ \(TE2\)](#), will allow operators to actively work to prevent large crowds, while also providing each guest the personalized experience they desire.

## Communicate Important Messages to Guests at Key Points Throughout Their Visit

### AUTOMATICALLY SEND NOTIFICATIONS TO GUESTS UPON ARRIVAL

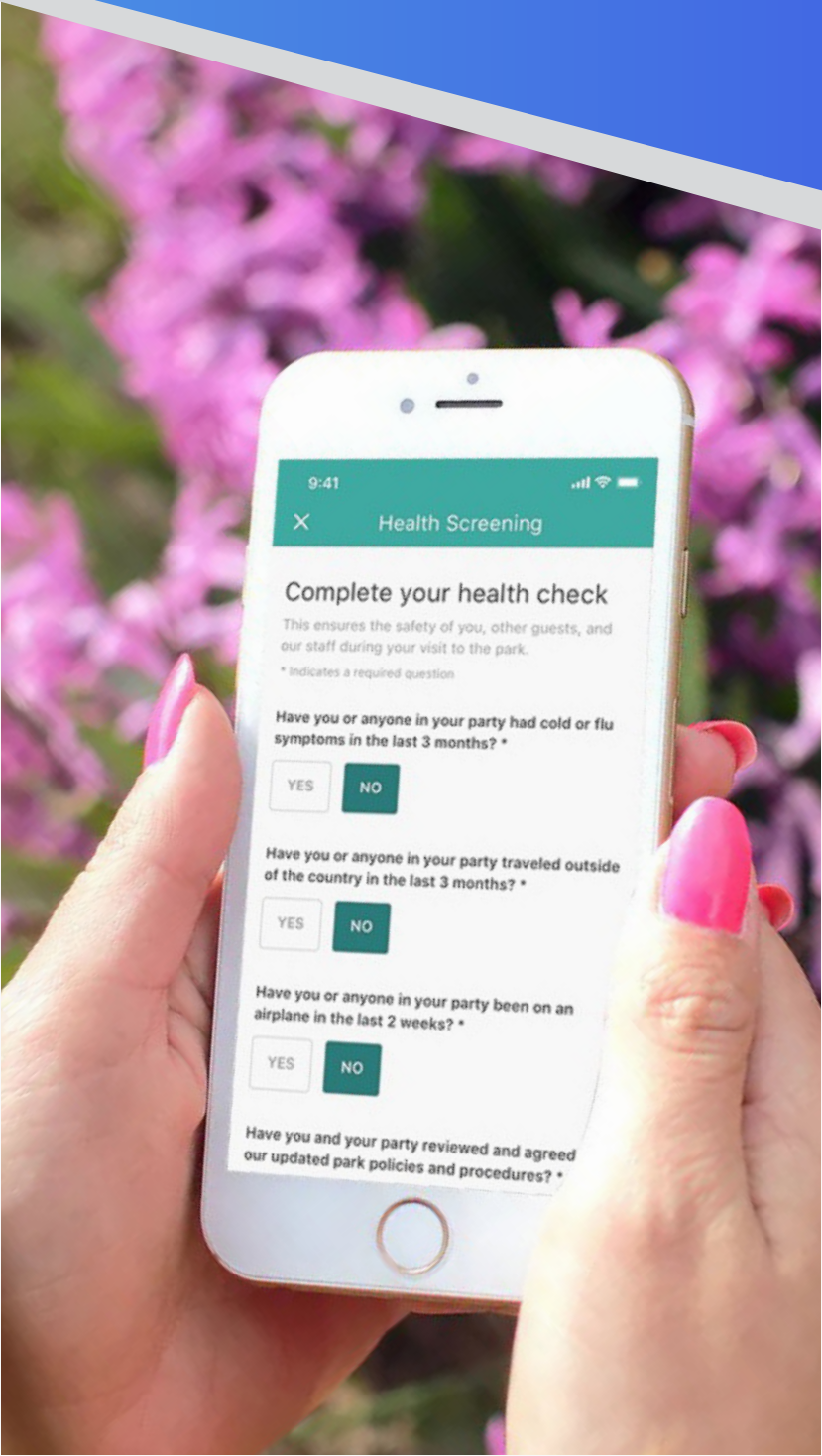
- Alert guests who have not completed the health questions: "Please make sure to complete our quick health questionnaire prior to entering the park."
- Provide real-time information alerts: "The front gate is experiencing higher traffic. Please wait in your car."
- Manage crowd dispersal (e.g., if everyone tends to turn right after entering the park, encourage some people to turn left): "Turn left after the front gate to explore Adventure Zone!"

### GUIDE GUESTS TO BETTER, SAFER EXPERIENCES

- Provide guests with information about nearby health & safety content (hand sanitizing stations, mask pickup locations, bathrooms, phone charging stations, etc.) via their **TE2**-powered park map.
- Help guests get food and beverage items without waiting in line and with minimal employee contact via mobile F&B offerings.

### MANAGE THE TRAFFIC FLOW OF YOUR GUESTS

- Monitor the flow of guest traffic in real time to prevent crowds before they form. With the **TE2** Live Branded Map®, operators have a heat-map view of the park for proactive crowd management.
- Identify pinch points (areas that consistently become congested) and modify the environment to prevent them (e.g., by moving benches, bushes, rope lines, etc.).
- Send guests Experience Crowd Alerts™: Ensure guests are not bunching in high traffic areas of the venue by sending messages in real time to direct guest traffic to less dense areas.

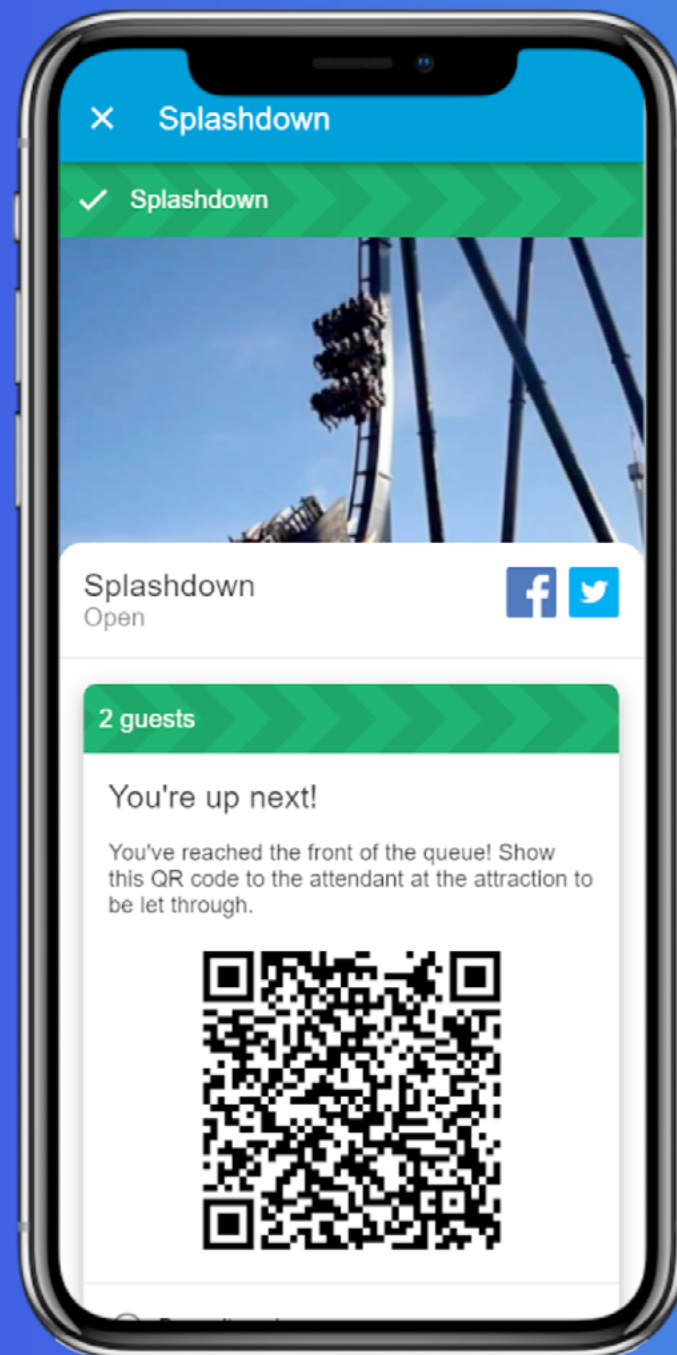


## Expedite COVID-19 Contact Tracing

In the event that a guest or staff member tests positive for COVID-19, it is essential to have a means to notify anyone who many have come into contact with them so they can be notified. Our **TE2** solution provides the ability for park staff to communicate with guests that visited on a specific date for contact tracing, if necessary.



# WHAT DEFINES VIRTUAL QUEUING?



*"The ability to offer 100% virtual queuing has been instrumental in allowing our park to reopen safely - and it's been very successful. Our guests are happier virtually queuing, and our in-park sales are up, which helps make up for our reduced capacity. I would recommend Accesso's virtual queuing to any park."*

*- Mascha van Till, General Director, Walibi Holland*

It's important to outline what sets true virtual queuing apart from less advanced timeslot ride reservation systems. Virtual queuing is dynamic and takes into account real-time park attendance, weather impacts, ride load times, etc. Conversely, timeslot reservation systems do not allow for these dynamic changes and run the risk of creating a domino-effect of guest satisfaction issues if delays occur early in the day, or loss of potential throughput if lines move faster than anticipated.

For theme parks and attractions to fully ensure the safety of their guests once gates reopen, it's crucial that the technology they rely on empowers them to remain nimble and agile, regardless of the circumstance.

For example, with [accesso LoQueue virtual queuing](#) on our **Qsmart®** solution, entry and ride reservations can be a breeze. The use of guests' own mobile phones is convenient and helps put guests at ease, as they're operating a device with which they're familiar, while removing a potential physical point of contact. Further, without the need to configure additional hardware, our **Qsmart** solution boasts a quick implementation time.

Last year, **accesso's** virtual queuing technology empowered millions of guests to step out of lines, and we expect that is only going to grow as more theme parks and attractions increase their focus on technologies like virtual queuing to promote physical distancing.

Though virtual queuing is traditionally a premium add-on, making the technology available to all guests at no cost can help venues welcome back their guests safely.

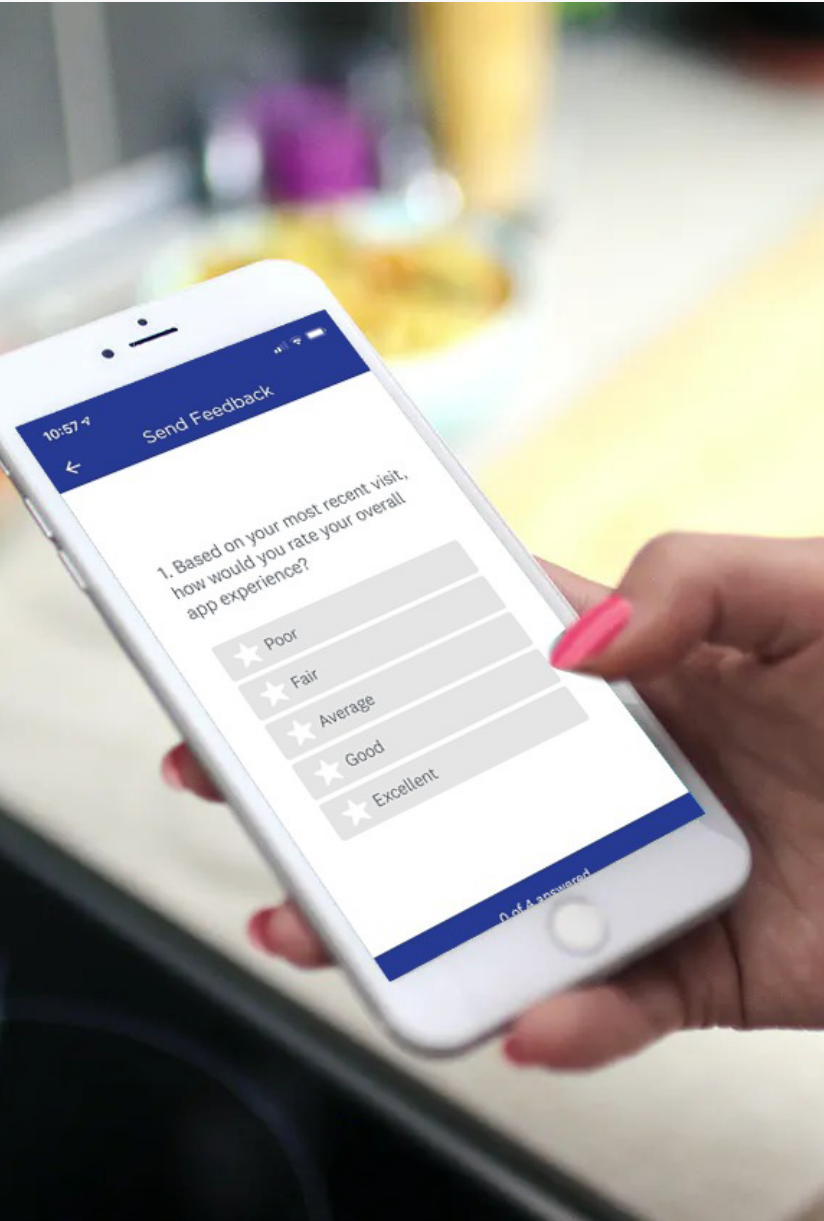
If a park would like to offer a VIP option for guests who want a more premium experience, we are able to configure the solution to allow for service levels.



# RETURNING HOME

## Ongoing Communication and Capacity Control

The experience doesn't end once guests have left the park. Ongoing communication with guests once they've returned home remains key to ensuring guest satisfaction and building brand loyalty.



Communication can take on various forms, but there are two areas of focus that stand out as top priorities:

### Follow-up surveys

Follow-up surveys were standard in monitoring the guest experience years before COVID-19 came into the picture. However, these guest surveys will now play a crucial role in ensuring guest satisfaction in light of the new protocols and guidelines. If something is not working well within the park, guest survey responses will be one of the first indicators of challenges that may require attention, and therefore, should be monitored carefully.

Used correctly, these survey responses can be used as a tool to further improve park operations while continuing to ensure guest safety and satisfaction.

### Promotions

Chances are, your venue is looking for more than just a one-off visit from your guests – you're looking to build (or re-build) a base of loyal enthusiasts. Once a guest has experienced all your theme park, attraction or venue has to offer, your next challenge is providing them with compelling reasons to return.

By using a guest experience management platform, operators can leverage insights about guest behavior and generate customized offers and promotions that are more attractive to individual guests. These personalized gestures show guests that they're heard, understood and not just another "number in the crowd," which increases the chance they'll return to redeem their personalized offer.

### Capacity Control

Another important consideration during the current COVID crisis is the tracking of guest capacity. By "scanning out" guests as they leave your venue, you can provide your operational staff with an accurate count of guests within your venue and empowering them to maintain a safe environment for guests. With the right technology, the "scan out" can be seamless and simple for your guests.





## FINAL THOUGHTS

Navigating the various stages of a guest's journey has always been an in-depth process – one that's crucial to building a base of loyal followers – and COVID-19 has presented new challenges on this front.

In the wake of the pandemic, guests will have different expectations that operators will need to meet, simultaneously ensuring the safety of all while seeking to preserve guests' enjoyment of their favorite theme parks, venues and attractions. As operators look to the future of the industry and the new age of physical distancing, it's certain that technology will play a critical role in not only meeting those expectations but exceeding them.

*Ready to plan your reopening?*

*We'd love to help.*

*Contact us today at [sales@accesso.com](mailto:sales@accesso.com).*