

CRUISE & CONNECTIVITY

Setting sail from the Challenges of a Lifetime

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The shipping industry, and especially the passenger sector, has and continues to be severely disrupted by the COVID-19 crisis. The passenger sector is experiencing further delays, and the uncertainty around the return of sailings will put immense pressure on even the strongest balance sheets. Most cruise lines do not have planned sailings in the near future, and those beginning to sail soonest have mainly pivoted to hy-

perlocal itineraries, with many ports still closed to cruise traffic. The industry is plastered with major challenges during these unprecedented times. How will the industry recover from the pandemic?

A return on the horizon

Cruise lines remain hopeful of returning to the seas later this year and returning passengers will have cruise operators going to great lengths to make the onboard guest experience nothing short

of exceptional.

But in order for the industry return to health a number of pieces need to fall into place, not all of which are in the cruise lines' hands. For example, people need to feel comfortable traveling and gathering — yet there is not much the cruise industry can do about this. To get to the ships, passengers by and large need to travel by plane, which brings with it risks.

Once on board, hygiene and social dis-

tancing will also need to be enhanced to minimize the risk of infections. There's no plain sailing, given that a cruise is an inherently social event, so at the end of the day, it will take a vaccine to get people truly moving again.

Not only this, ports must welcome cruise ships back. Many smaller ports were already pushing back on allowing the largest ships to berth pre-COVID. In the next phase, ports will need to weigh the economic benefits against possible health risk. This may push both cruise lines and travelers to seek itineraries with smaller ports or accelerate the trend toward expedition cruises.

The key to success

All aspects of the passenger experience, including connectivity, must be extraordinary to ensure the industry's return to operations and future success. Even before the pandemic, cruise lines competed against land-based resorts for vacationers. One of the indispensable tools in that battle has been the advent of broadband connectivity on board to enable an online experience for passengers and crew with as many of the comforts of home as possible. And it is clear to see why. Integration of reliable, high-speed broadband satellite connectivity will ensure that cruise lines never miss a beat and will keep passengers satisfied, allowing them to communicate on social media, stream video content or browse the internet, check work emails, and allow for medical diagnostics. It will also enable crews to monitor the vessel's many elements and become operationally more effec-

tive. The effect of lockdown has also resulted in higher expectations from the onboard connected experience as many people have been forced to work from home and have relied more heavily on "remote" connectivity tools to connect with family, friends, work and the world. As people return to travel, they will not go without the promise of constant connectivity.

In order to deliver the communications services that are so important today, it's crucial that the right VSAT platform is in place. As cruise lines gradually begin to operate again, they will require the latest technology to enable the delivery of a best-in-class service to their passengers and crew.

Setting sail again

Like any other business, shipping organizations are facing intense pressure to operate more efficiently, decarbonise, comply with regulations, and meet the digital demands of today. These are clear challenges which the industry must address if it is to return to an even keel. Satellite connectivity enables all of this and more. By adopting VSAT technology, operators enable the broadband services that connect their vessels to headquarters and other vessels in their fleet, allowing in-depth monitoring and communications. It is this connectivity that results in streamlined operations that in turn save ship operators precious time and money.

ST Engineering iDirect will continue to innovate with its partners to ensure an ever-better cruising experience for crew, passengers, and the ship environment alike.

The Author

Faiola

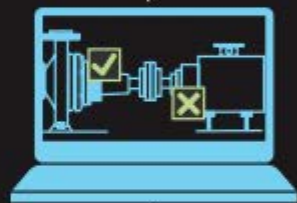
Andrew Faiola is the Head of Mobility at ST Engineering iDirect.



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