

The background features a smartphone in the foreground with various travel-related icons such as a location pin, an airplane, a camera, a sun, a thermometer, a downward arrow, a USB drive, and a stack of money. Behind the phone is a travel document with fields for 'Observations', 'Duration', and 'Seat & Class | Place et classe'.

FCM INSIGHT

# Help or hype: do travel apps make a difference?

# Mobile APPS

**Mobile applications continue to promise so much in corporate travel but they haven't quite delivered - yet.**

There is the distant dream of a single app acting as an access point to airline and hotel and restaurant reservations, itinerary management, ground transportation, loyalty schemes, digital wallets and perhaps even a virtual assistant.

*These services would all be seamlessly integrated to allow for travel policy compliance, duty of care obligations as well as expense management and the all important spend visibility.*

And, they would truly act as a digital companion with in-trip timely information for travellers and push notifications with helpful tips and tricks that could increase efficiency and even improve compliance.

All that sounds a far stretch from where mobile apps are today in corporate travel but that's not to say they haven't come a long way. Most travel management companies now provide an itinerary management service with some also offering the ability to make hotel and air bookings.

Other TMCs are taking a different route and looking to add services to improve the trip by providing up-to-date and relevant information while others still are going down the chatbot route.

And, anecdotally TMCs say travel managers now want travellers to be able to access travel policy content and authorisation via mobile apps as standard. The thinking is that it's easier to make the right decisions if it's there in front of travellers' eyes.



**Whatever the strategy there are promising signs of developments and partnerships that suggest what the next phase might look like.**

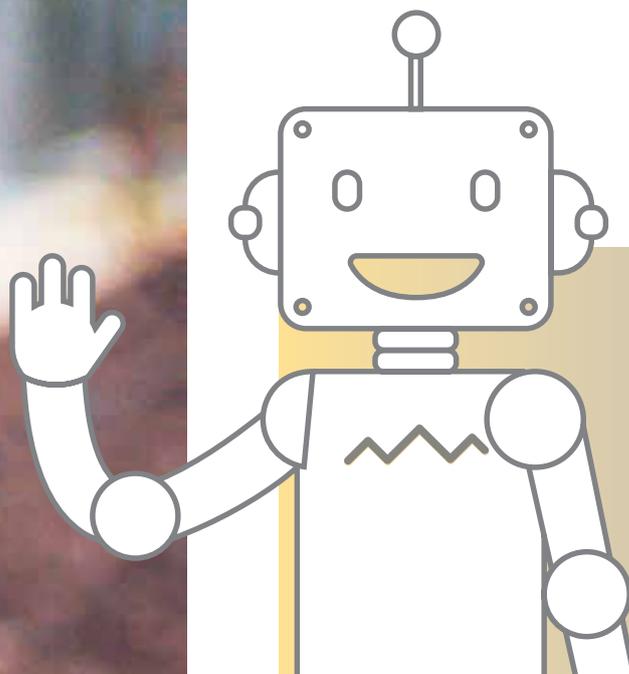
CarTrawler, the ground transportation platform, recently announced integration with Splyt is just one example. It enables airlines to offer ride-hailing services such as Careem, Cabify and MyTraxi via the carrier's app.

It's not hard to imagine a step or two further where a traveller lands in a destination, switches on their phone and is asked via chatbot if they require ground transportation. The chatbot already has access to the traveller's itinerary and policy and can go ahead and make that booking.

CarTrawler's chief technology officer Bobby Healy often speaks of the huge potential chatbots have for travel in terms of the "continual conversation threat" they provide between supplier or intermediary and traveller.

He suggests that chatbots lead to far better data on customers which means suppliers and intermediaries can provide a much more tailored service.

*In addition, the chat interface is already viewed as a valuable customer service tool which can tie all the elements of a trip together and help keep travellers up to date and present options, if things go wrong.*



## CHATBOTS

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**Bobby Healy, chief technology officer – Car Trawler**

# Mobile Promise

**FCM is one company that has already made in-roads with chatbot technology via its Sam app. Sam - 'Smart Assistant for Mobile' - combines artificial intelligence with the expertise of existing travel consultants to help travellers via a chat interface before, during and after a trip.**

A free version of Sam enables travellers to upload itineraries, access weather reports, view traffic and flight alerts and connect with local ground transport services.

*“There’s growing recognition from us and others in the corporate travel space of the need to support business travellers and improve the in-trip experience.”*

**Michel Rouse, chief technology officer EMEA FCM Travel Solutions**

Sam can also be configured for particular customers to automatically synchronise travellers' itineraries, provide a self-booking tool and offer live chat with an FCM consultant to assist with booking, amendments and other requirements while the traveller is on the go.

Another good example of where things might be headed is Lola, a Boston-based mobile app startup, which is all about providing a simple booking experience for frequent business travellers.

Like FCM's Sam, Lola aims to combine the best of AI and travel experts to ensure

business travellers are presented with the optimal hotel and flight suggestions based on elements including traveller preferences, budgets and personal circumstances - i.e having to drop kids at nursery before a flight.

And, Sam has been getting smarter. He can offer transfers via Uber or Lyft when travellers land. It can also present them with a city guide with local hints and tips.

These sorts of developments are exciting because they demonstrate what can be done but it's easy to get carried away. In corporate travel, each company is different culturally and has different requirements and mobile development needs to take these differences into account.

**“Corporate buyers and bookers have been the focus for technology developments in business travel often neglecting the needs of the business traveller.”**





# Looking East

**Another exciting area is developments in other regions of the world. China is always cited as the one to watch with many of its consumers living their lives on chat apps such as WeChat.**

It has become not just a powerful messaging and social media tool but also a mobile-payment tool. That last bit is particularly important because the platform has a billion monthly active users.

Not all these users will be business travellers, or even travellers for that matter, but everyone should take note of the staggering one billion monthly users who pay bills, buy groceries and other services, book appointments and even store national identity details which can be used to check-in to hotels and no doubt in the future, even more.

Developments from rival digital payment services such as Alipay are equally interesting. Restaurants in London's China Town recently began accepting the 'in-app order-and-pay' technology meaning travellers don't have to interact with staff.

Alipay, which has more than 700 million active Chinese users, is already enabling its users to pay for items at an increasing number of retailers as well as 76 European airports.

There is no pretending that these developments don't matter. They are mobile, transactional and consumer driven. They also help boost confidence in using mobile devices to complete transactions.

Right now, in business travel, the majority of point-to-point bookings are made via desktop computers and most more complex itineraries still require the human touch but acceptance of mobile to carry out more tasks is increasing all the time.

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***“The volume of users on these platforms is staggering and it's important to learn from consumer behaviour particularly in China where technologies tend to be more advanced.”***

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**Michel Rouse, chief technology officer EMEA FCM Travel Solutions**

# Consumer technology TRENDS

*The trend for consumer technology tipping into corporate travel is one of the drivers especially with younger generations coming into the workforce that run their lives via their mobile devices.*

Some research suggests that the average consumer checks their device 47 times per day.

Put simply, if your company or service is not there then it's not considered and not part of their daily lives.

There are other factors driving the rise of mobile with some large companies recognising the pace of change and pushing for a more digital workplace that can attract and retain the best employees.



# 86

The Deloitte Global Mobile Consumer study also reveals those aged 18 to 24 check their phones 86 times a day.





# 64%

Average travel app loses 64% of users after 30 days.

And, one further trend which should help accelerate mobile development in corporate travel is app fatigue. The Apple App Store had its 10th Birthday in the summer and has some two million apps. It's not even the biggest app store out there. But, one recent report reveals that more than half of travel apps are deleted after a month.

CleverTap, a behavioural analytics specialist, looked at more than 55 billion events carried out on more than a billion devices in the first six months of 2018, reveals that the average travel app loses 64% of users after 30 days so they have to be easy to use and providing real value to users.

# Staying in TOUCH

Alongside general app fatigue, there is a general sigh when anyone mentions chatbots these days. It's because everyone seems to have one, few are doing anything really different with them and yet as borne out above, they have so much potential.



*However, the signs are positive for chat too. In recent weeks, Malaysia Airlines announced it was the pilot customer for the Amadeus Chatbot for Airlines service. MHchat is a Facebook Messenger-based service that enables travellers to book and pay for flights.*

Malaysia joins many other carriers with Messenger-based chatbots offering everything from customer service to bookings and boarding passes.

But, the development also teases the possibility for integration with Amazon Alexa going forward. As these sorts of initiatives develop further, they open up additional opportunities. Travellers won't have to input information into their devices, they can just talk to them and the same combination of AI and existing human expertise can work in the background to assist them.



Malaysia joins many other carriers with Messenger-based chatbots offering everything.

# SUMMARY

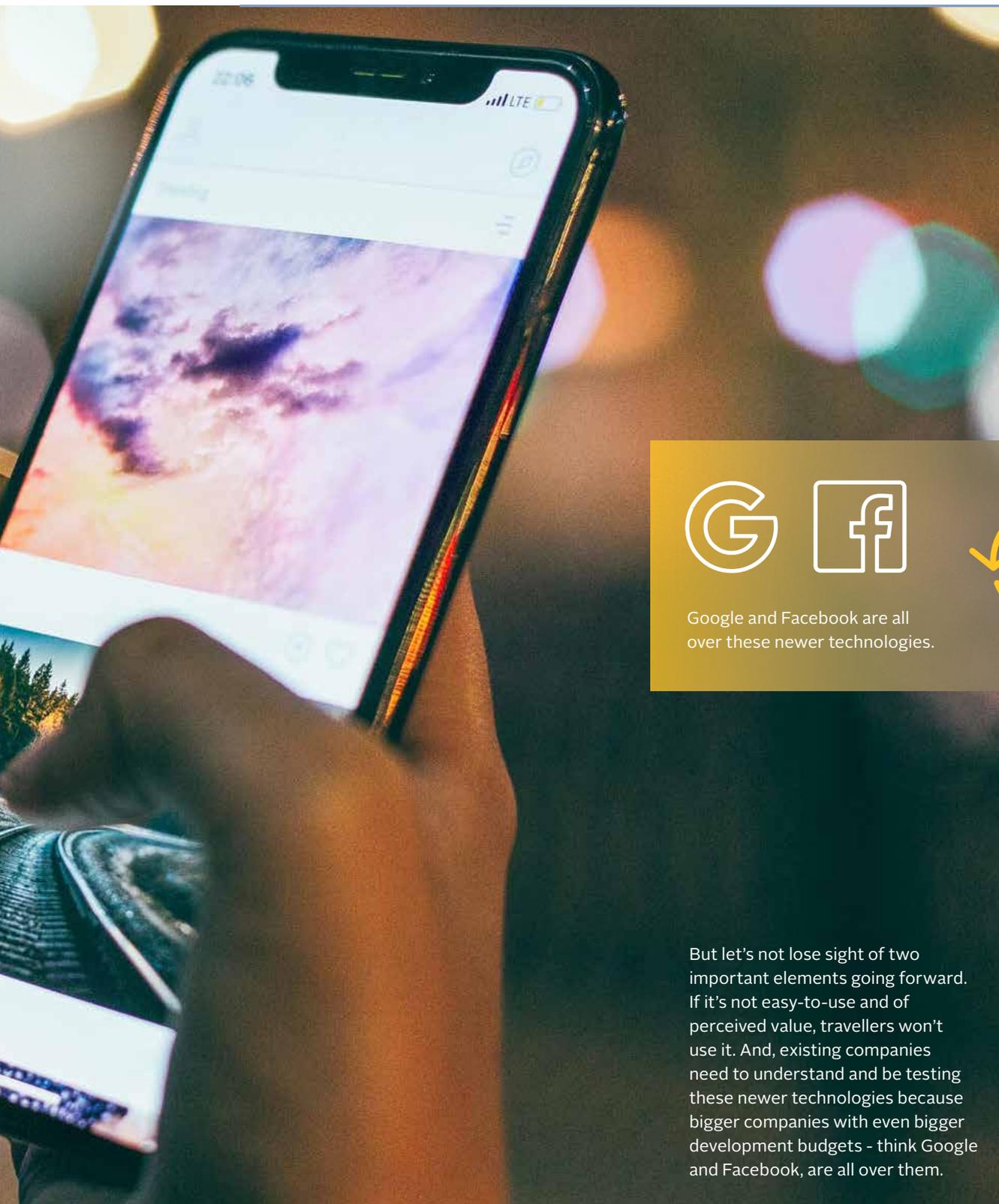


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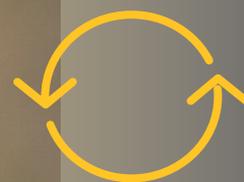
*Reaching the dream of a more integrated or even one app experience is not just about what consumers are doing or what business travellers want and/or see value in.*

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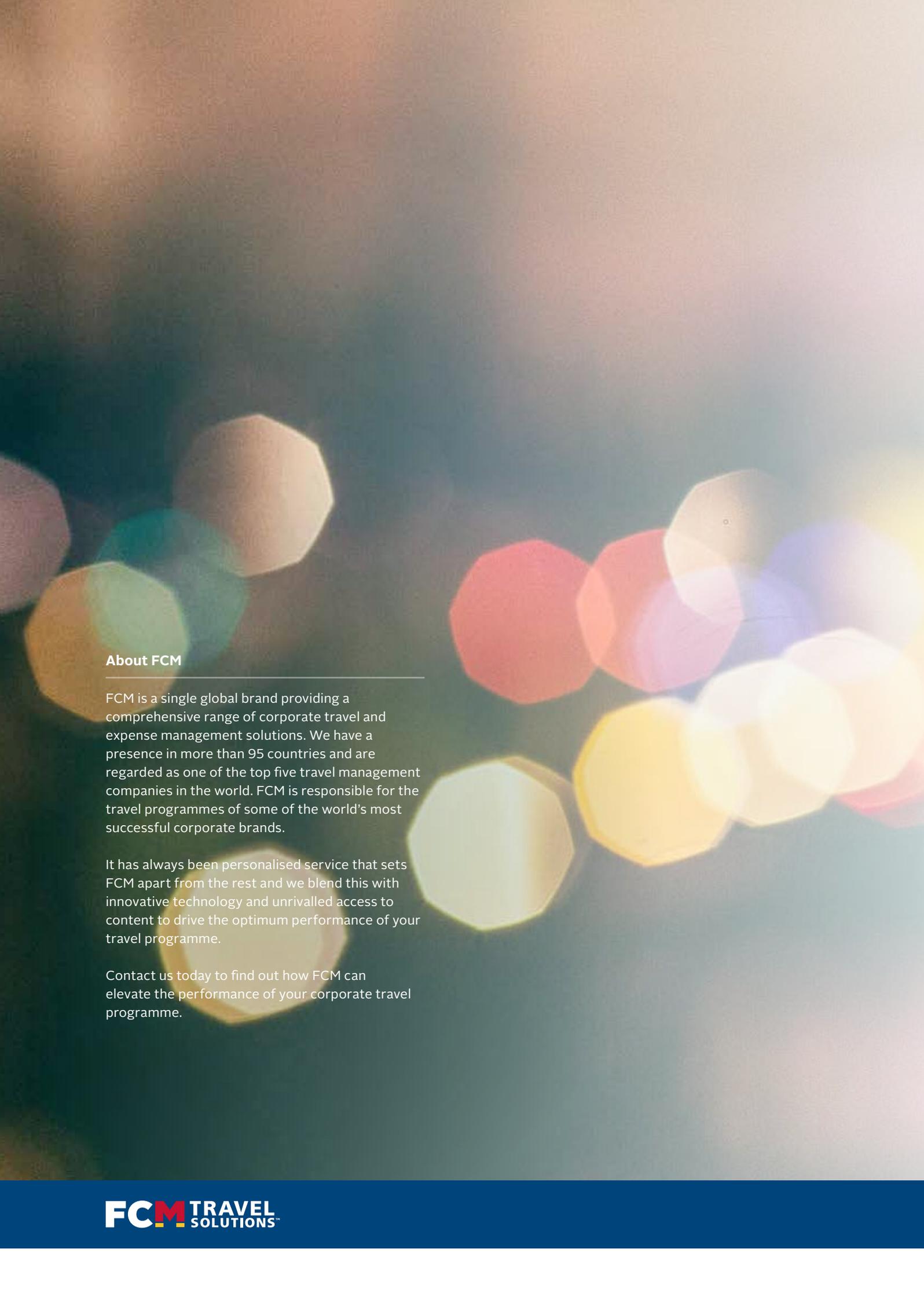
It's about the desire and readiness of technology players to develop the necessary features and functionality to improve the traveller experience.



Google and Facebook are all over these newer technologies.



But let's not lose sight of two important elements going forward. If it's not easy-to-use and of perceived value, travellers won't use it. And, existing companies need to understand and be testing these newer technologies because bigger companies with even bigger development budgets - think Google and Facebook, are all over them.



## About FCM

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FCM is a single global brand providing a comprehensive range of corporate travel and expense management solutions. We have a presence in more than 95 countries and are regarded as one of the top five travel management companies in the world. FCM is responsible for the travel programmes of some of the world's most successful corporate brands.

It has always been personalised service that sets FCM apart from the rest and we blend this with innovative technology and unrivalled access to content to drive the optimum performance of your travel programme.

Contact us today to find out how FCM can elevate the performance of your corporate travel programme.