

MOBILITY™

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Duty of Care

ARE YOU AND YOUR CLIENTS
PROVIDING ENOUGH?

THE HUMAN-AI

BALANCING ACT

READY TO BE

AUDITED?

SHORT-TERM

COMPLIANCE CHALLENGES



WORLDWIDE ERC®

A smiling man with short dark hair, wearing a light blue striped button-down shirt and tan pants with a black belt, is holding several colorful sticky notes (yellow, orange, and light blue) in his hands. The background is a bright, slightly blurred office setting. Overlaid on the image is the text 'ALGORI & BLU' in a large, bold, blue, distressed font. 'ALGORI' is on the top line, and '& BLU' is on the bottom line, with the ampersand being particularly large and stylized.

ALGORI & BLU



THINGS ES

WHAT SHOULD
WE EXPECT
FROM SERVICE
DELIVERY IN
THE AGE OF AI?

BY TOM BRUHN, CRP

In an episode of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* titled “The Outrageous Okona,” a secondary plot centered on the android character Data, who, in his quest to become more human, called up a holographic comedian to teach him how to be funny. Things didn’t work out so well, and throughout the show’s seven-season run, its writers did a great job of conveying how in circumstances where Data actually *was* funny—which was fairly often—it was completely unintentional. Humor, as is the case with so many other attributes, including empathy, is difficult to teach: One needs to have the innate human ability to “get it right.”

"The Outrageous Okona" first aired on 12 December 1988. According to "A Robot Walks Into a Bar, Doesn't Get the Joke: Struggling to Teach Humor to AI," an Associated Press article by Seth Borenstein published in April 2019, apparently not a lot has changed in the more than 30 years since:

"Artificial intelligence will never get jokes like humans do," said Kiki Hempelmann, a computational linguist who studies humor at Texas A&M University–Commerce. "In themselves, they have no need for humor." When it comes to humor, the people who study it say context is key.

"Even expert linguists have trouble explaining humor," said Tristan Miller, a computer scientist and linguist [now at the Austrian Research Institute for Artificial Intelligence in Vienna]. "Creative language—and humor in particular—is one of the hardest areas for computational intelligence to grasp. It relies so much on real-world knowledge—background knowledge and commonsense knowledge. A computer doesn't have these real-world experiences to draw on."

Sound familiar? With all the paradigm shifts achieved via new technology tools and process improvements, what are the ramifications for the mobility industry? Will a robot ever truly empathize with the countless factors that make professional relocations one of the most stressful events any human being can experience? It goes without saying that we're a long way away from the day when customer- and client-facing mobility professionals will be completely replaced by AI, so how are companies striking the balance in maintaining the human touch within an increasingly automated service delivery model? The efficiencies, data and insights we glean from machines processing huge volumes of information far more rapidly and accurately than humans ever could is great, but how do we make sure we're reading those algorithms for the best possible outcomes, without coming down with a serious case of the blues?

On the overwhelming plus side of the technology equation is anything pertaining to data: creation, capture, aggregation, analyzation, and delivery—you name it. IT solutions for every category and activity

have improved and continue to improve exponentially. Because of the unique balancing act required in delivering a superior customer experience, mobility-related technologies must not only drive process efficiencies, but also address the "human equation" in terms of training and development, performance, support, and reward and recognition of mobility professionals and their customers.

From a supply chain perspective, regardless of whether the mobility team is in-house or partially or fully outsourced, here are some areas in which various supplier partners are achieving this delicate balance.

GLOBAL COMPENSATION

Ashley Daly, director of global compensation technology solutions at Ineo LLC, says technology is increasingly playing a direct and indirect value-adding role in the global compensation space. "Mobility technology continues to evolve to meet the increasing demands faced by mobility professionals operating in a complex global context—from maximizing visibility to key program data to helping facilitate compliance," she says.

Through advances in automating global compensation-related tasks that are time-consuming, predictable, or repeatable in nature (e.g., compensation collection and its associated audits), global mobility team resources are freed up for more nuanced, strategic activities, including the delivery of difficult compensation-related conversations.

"The human touch is irreplaceable when it comes to rationalizing to a senior executive why her total net pay has decreased relative to the last balance sheet—despite having received a base salary increase," Daly says. "The impact of interrelated factors like home versus host-country exchange rate fluctuation and inflation are not necessarily intuitive and, unless proactively and tactfully communicated, can lead to alarm and escalation."

The human element is also fundamental to establishing what a given customer values most from a compensation perspective. Daly firmly believes "a robot can explain basic balance sheet concepts and definitions, but only a seasoned mobility professional can glean an individual's underlying motivations and position a compensation-related conversation accordingly."

Mike Gatto, manager of global mobility at Ineo, adds, "Technology can provide in seconds what formerly took hours—if not days—within the complex

world of corporate and individual compliance, especially in the tax area.”

Gatto notes that it’s important to establish a tool of choice that will be updated frequently to capture ongoing global tax law changes. Additionally, the user must have expertise in basic concepts of international relocation to validate the tool’s data inputs and outputs. Simple, repetitive tasks can easily be programmed to minimize time spent in reviewing and auditing essential data, thus leading to a more effective and supportive international assignment and transfer program.

IMMIGRATION

According to findings from Fragomen’s *Worldwide Immigration Trends Report 2019*, over the next 18 months, an increasing number of countries are likely to adopt digitization processes with respect to immigration. However, outdated technological infrastructure systems in many countries, coupled with the challenges of managing change, may limit process efficiencies and could potentially cause severe global disruptions.

The political and business desire to enhance efficiencies and cost savings through increased e-filings, e-issuance, e-verification, and more, has in many cases outstripped the infrastructure’s ability to deliver on these promises.

“There are two issues that are guaranteed in global immigration: change and uncertainty,” says Scott Angelo, CIO of Fragomen, Del Rey, Bernsen & Loewy LLP. “And the increasingly rapid pace of technology advancements is having a dramatic impact on global migration. Add to that the unpredictable international economy and the unsettled geopolitical climate, and it’s even more imperative to ensure that the immigration process is as seamless as possible for our clients.”

To that end, in 2017 Fragomen created an interactive Immigration Technology Innovation Lab in Pittsburgh, which houses director-led teams in business intelligence, client engagement, development, infrastructure, innovation, product management, predictive analytics, security, and user support. Fragomen’s aim is to work in tandem with its clients to create solutions for immigration services delivery that leverages deep expertise and global best practices.

In fact, in November 2019 Fragomen created a client advisory board that includes Fragomen immigration and mobility professionals as well as several Fragomen

client members. The board discusses key global technology issues and how they can be best addressed, both from a strategy and technology perspective.

“Importantly for us, technology isn’t created or used in a vacuum,” asserts Angelo. “No two clients are exactly alike. Our global client base is demanding faster, more efficient service, and we need to continually look for better ways to utilize the technology available to us, and we continue to invest in technology and data security.”

Angelo points to developments such as a mobile app, a client portal, and an enhanced mail processing operations center as a few that were created, in part, by working with the firm’s clients.

“There is never going to be a point where we say, ‘OK, we’re finished when it comes to finding new and better ways to meet our clients’ needs,’” Angelo says. “It will always be an evolutionary process, especially as the need for increased technology in the immigration arena continues.”

REAL ESTATE BROKERAGE

According to John D’Ambrogio, CRP, GMS, executive vice president of relocation and corporate services for real estate firms @properties Chicago and Ansley Atlanta, technology is part of their DNA, whether it’s internal agent communication tools or an automated cloud comparative market analysis. Still, “technology truly is a balancing act,” he says. “Our co-founder, Thad Wong, was Inman News’ 2018 Innovator of the Year, yet our culture is built on personal relationships.”

How do these brokerages maintain the balance? By using IT and AI to reinforce the focus on professional competencies and automating “the stuff”—including mailers, updates to and from agents and RMCs, and anything that doesn’t require significant customization to target a unique customer.

One example is a campaign by @properties and Ansley Atlanta that targets virtually all of their contacts on social media and customizes ads promoting the firms, with a link to additional information, effectively using AI to microtarget people in the industry. The ad itself might not generate immediate business, but it’s another call to action, a touch point, and a possible talking point to take advantage of when face to face.

D’Ambrogio also invests in short, concise videos. He notes, “Research overwhelmingly indicates we remember and retain visual images better than the written word.”

In addition to market updates, he has produced a video that goes out to all transferee listing

opportunities. In 60 seconds, it explains that several agents will likely call to set up appointments to inspect the transferee's home, why transferees shouldn't discuss price, and why the mobility industry does not use a traditional broker's market analysis (BMA), thereby providing answers to the three most commonly asked transferee questions.

All of that leaves more time for relationship building, whether that means traveling to clients to shake their hands and meet face to face, carving out time each week to write 10 thank-you notes by hand, or the old-fashioned act of simply picking up a phone.

DESTINATION SERVICES

Destination services offer rental finding and community acclimation support for transferees who will lease a home in their new city. Through technology advancements, transferees have immediate access to data that helps educate them about key elements of their new location. "We're balancing the human equation with the transferees' need for immediate access to information," says Diane Ayres, CRP, president of PorchLight Rental & Destination Services.

Whether users choose an accompanied or self-guided experience, one thing is always true: They want access to local, qualified expertise to help them make an informed, sound decision in securing their lease. When companies couple local expertise with online tools, users can formulate a direction and begin deciding on communities that align with their lifestyle while also assessing commute times and housing costs. They are able to productively visit the local market to view housing options.

Employers are also benefiting from technology advancements in ways that help them understand employee utilization, experience, and service outcomes. "Renter analytics have become a key differentiator for PorchLight as we serve our customers," says Ayres. "Since the inception of our business in 2003, PorchLight has provided rental finding outcomes as one of our performance measurements and service pillars. Today, that metric is immediately available online for customers, and we provide even more encompassing data."

At the click of a link, employers can see:

- Percentage of transferees who secured a lease as a result of the service.
- Service utilization.
- Costs overall and costs by utilization.
- Percentage of transferees wanting to avoid temporary housing.

- Number of days saved in temporary housing as a result of effective destination services.
- Transferee surveys.
- High-level dashboards or details of any move with exportability.

"Over the past two months, I've had the pleasure of speaking at two relocation forums where I had the opportunity to share our analytics," adds Ayres. "Most employers receive survey data, but none knew how many renters were securing leases from the service provided. ... Helping clients identify key measurements is part of our responsibility as suppliers. The human element (suppliers) coupled with the analytics enables our clients to have the empirical data needed to make quality program decisions."

CORPORATE HOUSING

Bleisure—the blending of business and leisure travel—has been reported as one of the fastest-growing trends in the industry, with 90% of millennials, 81% of Gen Xers, and 80% of baby boomers participating. As the corporate housing industry shifts to meet the new demands of its customers, those in charge of managing temporary housing needs—corporate travel managers, relocation consultants, human resource executives, and others—are also experiencing added emphasis on safety, security, and duty of care. The key to responding to the rapidly accelerating velocity in the broader ecosystem of the short-term rental industry is a high-tech, yet high-touch, technology platform.

According to Dave Caple, chief operating officer at RESIDE Worldwide Inc., most of the company's advances in managing the rapid pace of change within the mobile workforce have been realized through technology. "Our technology platform 3SIXTY offers customers a blend of proprietary technology, operational expertise, and access to a globally vetted supply chain to ease relocation, internship, business, and vacation travel processes for mobile, on-the-go clients and guests," he says.

The platform was designed from the ground up to improve the overall mobility process for relocation and travel companies, clients, guests, and network partners, offering direct access to more than 650,000 accommodation options that span traditional corporate housing, hotels, short- and long-term apartments, student housing, and single-family homes in more than 170 countries across the Americas, APAC, and EMEA.

Caple notes, "Combining our 3SIXTY technology with our day-to-day hospitality processes allows

RESIDE to control all aspects of the service delivery cycle by incorporating bilateral guest communications, case management, and business intelligence into our already tried-and-true high-touch customer service delivery. Dialogue with all clients and guests gives us real-time views of their needs during their stay with us, and we can more readily react. Leveraging our systems also ensures consistency of the guest experience and allows us to monitor to RESIDE's high service standards."

HOUSEHOLD GOODS

"In household goods transportation, we use a blend of technology advances intertwined with good old-fashioned customer service," says Jim Rybarczyk, CRP, GMS, director of corporate business development at Berger Moving & Relocation. "Electronic logs, electronic inventories, virtual surveys, [use of] AI to quickly capture information on goods to be moved, apps for customers, GPS tracking, advanced truck technology, and use of mobile devices for communication and exchange of information are all part of our service offering. Although technology is an enabler for better flow of information, as long as people own and move goods, they will need to interact with other people to truly have an excellent customer experience."

Rybarczyk points out that the movement of goods into and out of a home is an intimate experience. "We have seen very few advances in technology that would replace the pure brawn it takes to move goods from a residence into a truck. Add in the sentimental value certain belongings hold, and the human element becomes very real during a relocation. No amount of artificial intelligence, technology tools, or IT solutions will be able to appropriately pack grandma's china for safe shipping!" he says.

Rybarczyk also believes that no technology advancement has found a way to replace the human touch needed to successfully complete a move. "Pulse surveys, whizzy apps, and mobile devices are great for immediate feedback, but it takes an experienced customer service person to decipher and solve complex problems," he says. "Moving is stressful and can cause emotions that would often go undetected if we simply depended on technology to interact with customers. A skilled customer service person can sense the root cause of an issue and easily defuse a complex situation via the multiple touch points throughout a move process. The best technology will never take the place of an empathetic move

coordinator who develops a rapport and relationship with the family that is moving."

While self-driving trucks may one day change the mode of transportation, it is unlikely they will eliminate the need for human involvement. Striking the balance between human interaction and the use of technology as an enabler will be the norm for the foreseeable future.

THE FINAL ANSWER?

At the 2019 Great Lakes Relocation Council conference in Detroit, during a breakout session focused on strategies for managing extended business travel, Tessa Boone, global mobility manager for Ford Motor Co., succinctly noted, "Technology provides fantastic tools but usually does not provide complete answers."

In support of this view, the recent Worldwide ERC® webinar "Digitization, Automation, and the Future of Mobility Management," sponsored by Bristol Global Mobility, was structured around this guiding principle: *Human relationships will remain core.*

High-touch service delivery to customers and employees within the mobility industry begins and ends with *people skills*—curiosity, collaboration, creativity, and compassion—while technology provides channels to facilitate processes, experiences, and insights. The day may never come when mobility professionals are replaced by cartoon goofy or sci-fi scary robots, but design thinking, bots, and AI are here to stay and will continue to be used more prevalently within service delivery strategies for virtually every business.

Over the past decade, several mobility startups have attempted to break the mold by offering predominantly tech-focused service solutions. If the focus swings too heavily toward tech, many can find it necessary to recalibrate their platforms to allow for more human intervention. As noted above in six distinct supplier partner categories, forward-thinking industry leaders continue to find increasingly resourceful ways to ensure that their customers, including their own employees, are fully armed with the skills, information, and algorithms they need—and never left singing the blues. *M*

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