

Ferry Business

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VIRTU OF NECESSITY

Francis Portelli discusses Virtu Ferries' vital role for Malta's economy



A NEW ERA

Two next-generation Spirit of Tasmania ferries to join the fleet



EMERALD ISLE

Andrew Sheen explains Irish Ferries' green initiatives

Rising to expectations

Simon Johnson asks four ferry operators how they are continuing to deliver an excellent experience for their customers during times of change

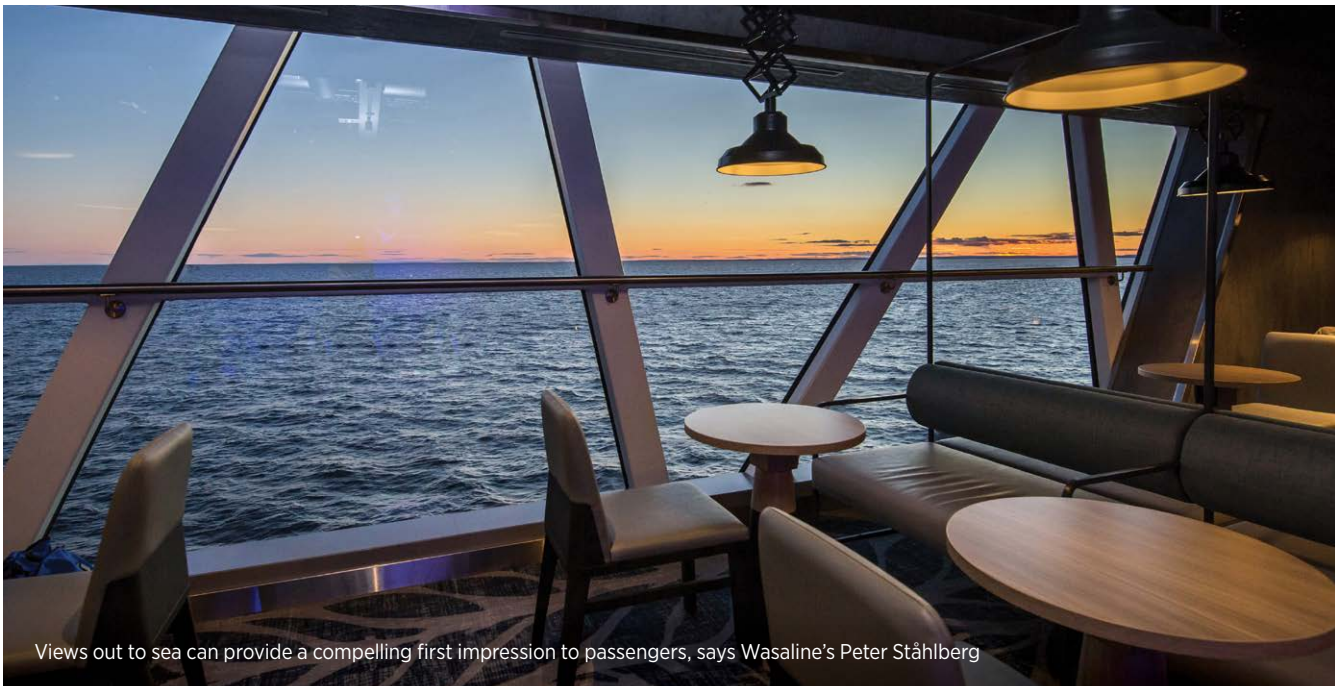
After the unprecedented disruption of the last few years, ferry operators could be forgiven for wanting a chance to take a breath. But customers have an unerring habit of demanding excellence; perhaps even more so as inflationary pressures lead them to scrutinise the value they are getting for every form of expenditure. The companies that succeed will be those that best meet customer expectations and deliver satisfaction at every step.

Here, four ferry line executives explain what they consider to be crucial to the customer experience, how needs may have changed, and the challenges they need to overcome to realise their visions.

What are the most important considerations in building a first-class customer experience?

Peter Ståhlberg, Managing Director, Wasaline:
For customers, coming onboard the ship is like opening a new book – you have

to tell them a good story. I come from the world of cruise and tried to bring some of the ideas from there to our ship's design, including the importance of a good entrance. You can win or lose the customer in the first few seconds. So, in our main halls, we have a lot of local pictures of our destinations and large windows offering views out to sea. They really help to sell the experience of being onboard the ship, telling the story we want to tell right from the start.



Views out to sea can provide a compelling first impression to passengers, says Wasaline's Peter Ståhlberg



Destination-focused designs, such as this Spanish art gallery onboard Brittany Ferries' Galicia, can help ferry operators tell a story through their interiors

Steve Newbery, Director, Onboard Services, DFDS: Expectations vary depending on the route – for our longer cruise routes it's about the destination and a slower, more considerate, onboard offer. For short-sea routes it's all about providing what passengers need in preparation for their holiday – perhaps good food, shopping for forgotten essentials, a little entertainment and good rest.

“For customers, coming onboard the ship is like opening a new book – you have to tell them a good story”

Joëlle Croc Director, Customer Experience, Products & Onboard sales, Brittany Ferries: It's about knowing our customers and their expectations. An intimate knowledge of our customers and of our brand links directly to being able to deliver a quality of experience that meets our brief. With that in mind, we design all aspects of the ship to respond to

the customer's needs, from the comfort of the cabins to the type of restaurant and the shopping experience. That enables us to cover what they want and manage their satisfaction, encouraging them to come back in the future.

Matteo Della Valle, Director, Passenger Sales & Marketing, GNV: Italians love to take their pets on vacation and so good animal facilities are a big priority. We've increased the number of cabins dedicated to animals and created spaces on our vessels specifically for pets and their owners, allowing for a good experience for both them and those who don't want to meet a pet onboard. And of course, we all expect a good wi-fi service wherever we go, and it can be challenging to deliver at sea sometimes! We are investing in delivering an excellent service that matches what customers will have at home to ensure their connectivity needs are met.

How have customer expectations changed over the last few years?

JC: In very recent months, the context of growing inflation in the countries we serve has affected the sensitivity of customers to prices. They need to know exactly what is onboard, what its price is, and if they can afford it or

The host:



SIMON JOHNSON
Director
Shipshape Consulting

The panel:



JOËLLE CROC
Director
Customer Experience, Products and
Onboard Sales, Brittany Ferries



PETER STÅHLBERG
Managing Director
Wasaline



STEVE NEWBERY
Director
Onboard Services, DFDS



MATTEO DELLA VALLE
Director
Passenger Sales & Marketing, GNV



Passengers have become more sensitive to prices in their onboard purchases after recent inflation, says Brittany Ferries' Joëlle Croc

not. In terms of design, there's therefore perhaps a need to think about how should display offers in restaurants, bars and shops to make sure that they're immediately visible and can capture customers' attention with good value for money.

SN: I agree that value for money is a significant need at the moment. People are willing to buy things onboard, especially food, but it has to represent good value for money. Just because you've got a captive audience doesn't mean you can have poor food and a high price. If we can make sure that we provide value, passengers won't be buying food before getting onboard, they'll be using our restaurants.

PS: Cleanliness has been a key concern ever since the pandemic. Passengers

expect everything to be spotless and well organised, and they're interested in how we handle the food and handle waste. It's very important that a crew know a little bit about what we're doing in those areas if asked. Passengers also now like the ship to feel very spacious, so that they don't feel like they've been crowded into an area like a restaurant.

What is the greatest challenge that you face in envisioning and building your customer experience vision?

MDV: You have to get any changes right the first time, because the investment has to continuing paying off for ten to fifteen years. You can build flexibility into some interior spaces so they can be transformed if the need arises, but most of your interior

experience has to last until the next major refit.

SN: The fact that every investment has to deliver an immediate return – through improved passenger ratings, higher rates, increased onboard sales, and more. Investments are deeply considered and measured to give a positive return for passengers and the company.

JC: Finding the perfect balance between our commercial needs and our passenger's needs within our budget is our most significant challenge.

PS: All of the above. We're a commercial operation and we need to find the right balance in everything we do. We therefore need our passengers to value the service and experience that we provide at a price that's fair for us, and for them. **CFR**

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A first-class customer experience

Simon Johnson asks four leading maritime interior designers about the importance of data, detailed design briefs and collaboration when it comes to creating sustainable onboard interiors that help passenger ship operators to deliver better guest experiences

Designing high-quality interiors that empower cruise and ferry brands to deliver seamless and unforgettable experiences onboard their ships is a lengthy and challenging process, particularly because passenger expectations are continually evolving, and operators need to adapt quickly to remain competitive and relevant. However, as four designers share below, there are several factors that can ensure success: a detailed design brief, data analytics, and constant communication and collaboration between all stakeholders in the project.

What surprises you the most when designing interiors for passenger ships?

Kristoffer Jensen, OSK Design: Shipowners sometimes expect passengers to behave in certain ways and ask us to design solutions on that basis without conducting research to confirm it will work. For example, one customer introduced a click-and-collect option for hot beverages on a short ferry route because they'd seen it working well on land, but it wasn't particularly well received by passengers because they preferred to sit in the café instead. This meant the client had wasted time, resources and space onboard the ship. Technology-driven innovations like this will certainly become a key part of the onboard experience in future,

but it's crucial that shipowners carry out customer research and consider the logistics before introducing them.

Helena Sawelin, Tillberg Design of Sweden: In some instances, the shipowner does not communicate the design vision to the onboard operations team very well, so we go onboard the vessel and find that spaces have changed since we designed them. For example, the onboard team may move a side table from a bar into a restaurant and this looks odd because it doesn't fit with overall design scheme or the layout. If we'd been able to speak directly with the operations team about their needs, we could easily have developed a design solution.

Alan Stewart, SMC Design: Sometimes we 'over design', thinking that we need to create a complicated design concept to deliver more value for our clients. Yet they often just want something simple, and it takes a particular skill for designers to know when to hold back. We must take time to read and fully understand clients' briefs to ensure we can design a solution that fits their expectations.

Jason West, WDC Creative: It's surprising how quickly customers' needs and expectations change, and how difficult it can be for passenger ship owners to keep up. To remain competitive, they must carry out extensive research and gain insights into what their customers want,

but also remember that these preferences will likely change quickly. The challenge for us is to be able to design spaces in such a way that will allow them to adapt their onboard offerings easily.

How important is a detailed design brief and collaboration with clients to the success of a project?

KJ: If I could send one message to shipowners it would be to develop a good brief to share with designers and architects before we start the project. In my experience, if clients don't deliver a detailed brief and continually come up with new ideas that they want to incorporate into the design, it can lead to a lot of back and forth between the designer, architect, shipyard and others in the project.

HS: Every project is different – some clients deliver very detailed briefs whereas others share a vague vision and ask us to advise or surprise them. It's crucial for designers – and ideally the architects – to talk directly with the client to understand exactly what they're looking for at the start of the project, then discuss ideas in detail. Most of the issues we face are caused by clients wanting to implement major changes or incorporate new ideas into the design late in the process, which hampers our productivity, is inefficient and costly for everyone. Taking a collaborative approach from the



Photo: wasaline M/S Aurora Botnia

beginning ensures our clients trust that we know what they want and how to deliver it, which usually means they're satisfied with the result.

AS: Projects always run more smoothly when a client develops a proper brief and discusses it thoroughly with the interior designers, architects and other necessary stakeholders so we're all aware of the main project goals and can work together to make their vision a reality. It also helps clients to trust us and makes it less likely that they will change their minds on things during the process.

JW: Clients often expect to deliver the brief one day and receive the final designs the next, but designers need time to properly interrogate the brief they've been given and develop ideas. We need to be able to go back to the client and ask plenty of questions to ensure we understand their aims and expectations. If we do this at the start of the project, everything else should progress smoothly.

What role will data play in helping designers and passenger ship operators to deliver better customer experiences?

KJ: All our designs will become data-driven in future – the more data the shipowner can collect about what their customers want, the easier it is for us to design spaces that will facilitate great onboard experiences.

AS: Often, the shipyard will create general arrangement plans and they'll simply divide up the vessel into spaces, for example allotting 200 square metres for a lounge and 300 for a restaurant. While we can work within

those constraints, we can produce much better designs if we use parametric planning algorithms to calculate how best to optimise onboard space using historical data from previous vessels. Data might show that the restaurant needs to be twice the size to accommodate the typical number of passengers and ensure smooth service.

HS: Data is very important in helping us to design spaces that will operate well and deliver a good experience for both guests and crew. For example, if we're designing a buffet venue, we can look at data to analyse where congestion usually occurs and plan the optimal layout for the food counters and the tables and chairs to avoid those issues.

Are your customers demanding more sustainable interiors and if so, how are you helping them to communicate this to passengers?

KJ: We're all concerned about the future of our planet and want to minimise our environmental footprints to protect it, but there has to be a strong business case for sustainability too. We need to help our clients to create stories that showcase how they're making the interiors of their ships more sustainable so they can use this as a unique selling point to attract environmentally conscious travellers.

HS: Sustainability has become one of the top priorities for our clients, although they're not all investing in it to the same degree – some are doing just enough to comply with industry

The host:



SIMON JOHNSON

Director
Shipshape Consulting

The panel:



KRISTOFFER JENSEN

Head of Interior and Accommodation
OSK Design



HELENA SAWELIN

Partner and Business Director
Tillberg Design of Sweden



ALAN STEWART

Director
SMC Design



JASON WEST

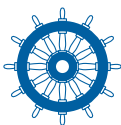
Managing Director
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standards and regulations, whereas others want to go far beyond that to track the sustainability credentials of all the materials and products we use for the interiors. Generally, European clients are much further ahead in their sustainability journey than those from the USA but it's vital to invest in this area because younger generations are especially conscious of their environmental footprints and they're the passengers of the future.

AS: Today, it's very rare that we get a design brief where a client hasn't mentioned

sustainability, which is why we've dedicated a whole section of our reference library to environmentally friendly materials and products. However, we're yet to find an elegant way of communicating the significant efforts they're making to the guests. It's easy to create a sustainability story around switching to a less polluting fuel, but how do shipowners convey to guests that the fabrics on the armchairs was the most eco-friendly option available?

JW: To make sustainable interior design choices more visible to guests, we need to

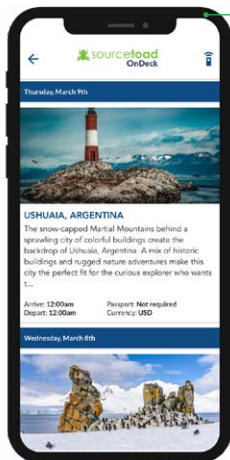
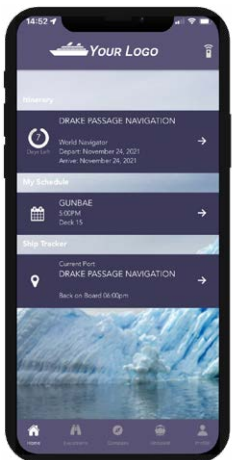
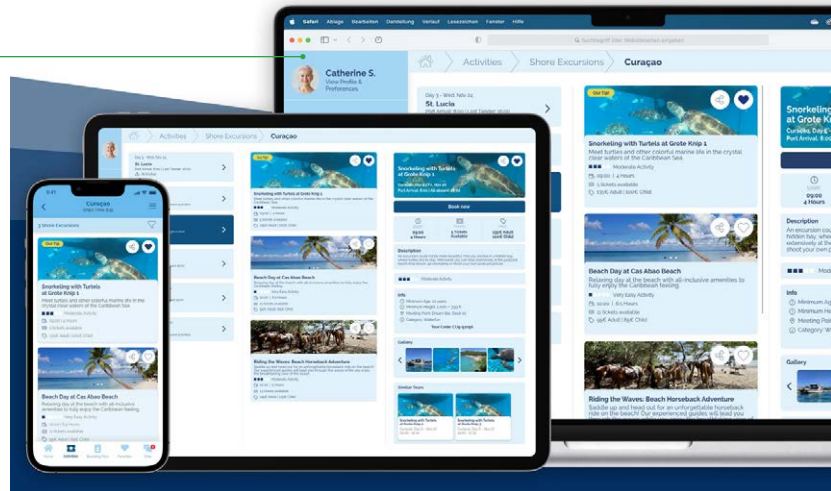
track sustainability at a granular level and demonstrate the full environmental impact of all the elements throughout every stage of their lifecycle. This information would include data on the impact of everything from sourcing the raw materials to manufacturing the products, shipping them to and installing them on the vessel, their daily use, and what happens when they reach the end of useful life. We're already doing this for interior designs on land, so the passenger shipping industry is a little behind here. **CFR**

Going mobile for an enhanced experience

MarineXChange and Sourcetoad highlight how their mobile applications are enabling guests to manage everything from check-in to payments and booking activities

Hannes Lindthaler
Managing Director, MarineXchange

"MXP365 is a new, feature-rich, cost-effective and cruise line-branded bring-your-own-device application that can be used by guests the moment they book a cruise. It uses the advanced capabilities of the MXP enterprise platform to enable guests to check in pre-cruise, update their preferences, purchase packages, log maintenance requests, track their luggage and book shore excursions, restaurants, onboard activities, spa and beauty treatments, fitness classes, and more. MXP has become the obvious choice for all cruise operators who are looking for more features in a fully integrated solution."



Greg Ross-Munro
CEO, Sourcetoad

"Sourcetoad's OnDeck passenger app allows for guests to easily manage their own reservations, itineraries, folios and payments pre-cruise and while onboard their vessel. Meanwhile, crew can use the backend event management and notification systems to alert guests of delays, updates, or any other notifications.

Having a pre-built mobile application has saved cruise lines millions of dollars in development and overhead costs. The customisations available allow cruise lines to provide a sophisticated and brand-appropriate experience for guests. The mobile app has had an 86 per cent penetration rate with passengers, making disruptive public announcements and long lines at guest services a thing of the past."