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Executives Rethink Life on the Road

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Time is money for business travelers, and a lot of them were doing new math yesterday as they contemplated what tighter security measures and longer lines would mean for their lives.

“I think sophisticated travelers are kind of inured to this kind of situation,” said Paul Metselaar, chief executive of Ovation Travel Group in New York. “Post 9/11, it’s a whole different mentality.”

Terry Taylor, who flies about 100,000 miles a year selling tools and diagnostic equipment for the automotive industry, said he was going to cut back on air travel.

“I’ll start to make a phone call instead,” he said, after arriving home in Detroit on a Northwest Airlines flight from Seattle yesterday afternoon.

As a salesman, Mr. Taylor said, “I’m a firm believer that it pays to get in front of the customer.” Indeed, one maxim of business travel is that “you can’t fax a handshake.”

But Mr. Taylor said he believed that customers would understand why he might want to conduct some business over the phone rather than in person and not hold it against him.

“It’s becoming too inconvenient to travel,” he added.

Edward Napoleon, who works in computer security in Cleveland, said his new rule of thumb for trips was that if he could drive to a business meeting in five hours or less, he would stick to the road rather than fly. “You spend three hours just getting into the airport,” he said.

For all their gritted teeth, business travelers could take some comfort in signs that travel was starting to return to normal yesterday. Most domestic airlines were able to get 75 to 80 percent of their flights departing on time yesterday, according to Flight Stats.

But most international airline flights departing from Heathrow and Gatwick Airports in Britain and Kennedy in New York were still experiencing severe delays. At British Airways, only a fifth of flights were departing on time worldwide, according to Flights Stats.

Many travel agents who specialize in serving business executives said they heard from very few business travelers who wanted to cancel flights.

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The airlines themselves said that very few customers were calling to cancel trips.

“Generally, the operation is remarkably normal today — with the exception of London,” said Tim Smith, a spokesman for American Airlines.

But broad measures of what was “normal” do not quite capture the new realities of flying for some business travelers.

The need to get to the airport earlier means more waiting time. For some, that means the airport is becoming their new office away from the office.

Jennifer Beach, 35, a human resources consultant from Minneapolis, said she arrived at O’Hare International in Chicago earlier than usual yesterday and was going to make the most of it by working during the downtime.

She said from she would probably start bringing more work to the airport. She may even schedule more business calls. “I’m going to jump on a conference call in about 14 minutes,” Ms. Beach said.

William Moros, a technology consultant from Wilton, Conn., who travels once a week for business, arrived two hours early at O’Hare instead of the usual one hour. “It does impact my schedule, but as long as I have my computer with me, I can work here,” said Mr. Moros, who was heading to White Plains. “So it’s not a big deal.”

Some travelers out of Britain probably wish they could say that.

John Wiggin, a management consultant based in Denver who flew to Newark yesterday from Gatwick, said he could not bring his laptop with him on board his flight. Nor was he able to take books, pencils or pads on board. "It was the 1800's," said Mr. Wiggin, who travels about 150 days a year. "It's certainly going to change how we travel. It's a severe, severe hit to our productivity."

Business travelers between Britain and the United States will of course find themselves without some of their favorite devices, like Palm Pilots and BlackBerrys, during their flights. They will have to pack them in their checked baggage, and not have access to them for many unproductive minutes, if not hours, before, after and during their trips.

The tighter restrictions irritated travelers in Europe. During an interview at Charles de Gaulle International Airport, serving Paris, Alexandre, a self-employed tax adviser who declined to give his last name, said the whole package of security measures and resulting delays was "making me lose time and money, and it is starting to get a bit much."

Business travelers are not just having to get to the airport earlier. They are also hanging around longer after their flight to wait for checked baggage — baggage that they used to simply carry on with them.

James Whitney, a consultant at a corporate-turnaround firm in Birmingham, Mich., carried his luggage onto his flight to Chicago earlier this week. But to avoid throwing out all of his newly prohibited toiletry items, he checked the suitcase for the hourlong flight back.

Long after the plane landed, Mr. Whitney was still standing in the baggage claim instead of driving home. "This is 45 minutes added to four hours of travel time," he said. "It's extremely inconvenient."

Others found a creative solution to avoid checking their bags. Tera Chowanec, 23, an analyst for a pension consulting firm in Philadelphia, said a colleague at a training program she attended in Chicago sent her makeup, shampoo and lotion home via FedEx so she could take her bag on board. Some people canceled their flights to Detroit and drove home instead, she said.

Since many businesspeople have to fly for their jobs, the difficulties of travel may affect some career choices. That, at least, is a prediction from Ken Plunkett, a New York-based salesman.

“It’s going to continue to get worse and people will rethink their careers,” he said. “I’ve heard people saying that there’s so much stress involved in getting from Point A to Point B that maybe they’ll take on a different career where they don’t have to travel.”

Reporting for this article was contributed by Gretchen Ruethling in Chicago; Michael Amon, Sarah Garland and Joe Sharkey in New York; Katie Kelley in Denver; Katie Zezima in Boston; and Caroline Brothers in Paris.