

Chief Executive, Business Travel Association

# CLIVE WRATTEN

The newly-appointed boss of the BTA tells **Andy Hoskins** about his vision for the industry organisation

It was a summer of change for the Business Travel Association. First came the unveiling of a new identity at its annual overseas conference, with its former moniker – the Guild of Travel Management Companies – cast aside.

A new Chair, Suzanne Horner, CEO of the Gray Dawes Group, was announced at the same event and then, in September, Clive Wratten took up the reins as Chief Executive of the new-look, 'more inclusive' organisation.

Wratten, close to his 40th year in the travel industry, has worked for a number of airlines and TMCs but has also had a long relationship with the BTA in its various guises.

"It was the mid-90s when I first came across the organisation," he says. "I've been a partner or supplier member for many years and on the executive board for the last three years, so it's been very close to me. I've seen it evolve and it's been an interesting journey."

Wratten was involved in the process of rebranding the organisation, a move he says is "hugely important... and key to modernising".

"We wanted to be the total voice of the business travel supply chain and the new name reflects that better than before. It helps take the great work that Adrian [Parkes] and Paul [Wait] have done and moves the organisation forward."

Wratten continues: "It's about getting the business travel industry recognised, particularly within government, as its own industry rather than being lumped in with travel as a whole. It's hugely different."

Was it difficult to leave his former role at travel management company Amber Road?

"Clearly it was a tough decision," says Wratten. "It was the first time I'd been a CEO running a private equity business. I was only three-quarters of the way through my project there, but sometimes you have to grab an opportunity when it comes along."

"There's so much happening in the industry – from sustainability, to distribution, to education – that to represent the industry and all those matters is hugely exciting."

The future of TMCs is a popular debating point, but their value was brought into focus on the day of this interview when British Airways pilots went on strike.

"It is these sort of times when the value of what we do as TMCs is most apparent, but equally there is the good value of what we do beforehand around advising clients and helping their businesses grow across the globe – that is bigger than what we do at times of disruption," says Wratten.

Another hot topic is consolidation in the TMC sector – most recently the acquisition of Amber Road by the Gray Dawes Group, announced shortly after this interview – which is being tempered by several new tech-based entrants.

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"Our members are of all shapes and sizes, specialisms and non-specialisms. There's always a space within the membership for every piece of that jigsaw," says Wratten.

"It's good for the industry that new entrants [like TravelPerk and TripActions] are coming in and looking at things from a different way. Change makes people and businesses stronger and equally makes them evolve."

Wratten's immediate focus is engaging with BTA members, growing the organisation and raising its profile in Westminster.

Launching an All-Party Parliamentary Group on business travel is an important step, says Wratten, which he sees focusing on infrastructure, sustainability and inclusivity.

"The prime thing is getting government to understand the value of the business travel industry to the UK, particularly right now when things are a bit rocky. The importance of business travel has never been greater."

He continues: "As an organisation we need to define the future rather than tweak the past. By that I mean that we've often gone through a scenario where something in the industry is changing but we've not been involved – it becomes negative disruption."

"We're all for evolving this industry and making it better through tech or our people, but we need to work in collaboration with partners and our supply chain so it becomes something positive rather than us all fighting about how to make it work for everyone."

"This industry's been amazing to me and now it's almost about the chance to leave a legacy in this role for the next generation of companies and individuals coming through."



## CLIVE WRATTEN

Clive Wratten joined the Business Travel Association (BTA) as Chief Executive in September 2019, taking over from Adrian Parkes. Wratten was previously CEO at travel management company Amber Road. His extensive career in the travel industry has also included roles with Etihad Airways, Gulf Air, Qantas and British Airways, plus HRG and American Express Global Business Travel.

## in brief...

### Clive Wratten on Brexit...

"We're no different to any other industry in that we just want clarity and direction because when you don't have that it creates noise. We just want to get it sorted. But when we do come out of Europe, business travel will be central to shoring up relationships and sealing deals around the world."

### On sustainability...

"It would be foolhardy of anyone to say that it's not here to stay this time. But sustainability is not just the 'green' piece, which is hugely important, but it's also the sustainability of this industry. It's about bringing new blood into it, doing business more efficiently, and making sure that when we are sending people away we're doing it in a sustainable way."

### On life away from work...

"I am a Reading FC fan and it's my 20th season as a season ticket holder at the Royals. That is my first love outside of my family."

### On travel destinations...

"Having had years of working for airlines and enjoying concession tickets on long-haul carriers, I've not visited Europe much on holiday. But we have been exploring it much more since I left Etihad and I'm really in love with the Med at the moment – Greece and Turkey in particular."