



## Covid-19 – the new 9/11 (only worse)

In the early hours of September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2001, I answered my mobile and rushed to turn on the TV to watch footage of the airliners crashing into the World Trade Center in New York. As the Executive Director of the Visit USA Organisation (Australia) I immediately realised that the world as we knew it would change forever.

I have that same feeling now as the Covid-19 case count rises. It is not the end of the world, but a 'new normal' will emerge as the supermarket shelves restock with toilet paper and hand sanitiser.

While the aftermath of 9/11 was still unfolding the VUSA Board were meeting and establishing a Tiger Team to assess known and possible threats to business, to develop strategies and action plans and to begin implementation when and wherever possible.

The world had changed, and the fear of another terrorist incident was real and ever present. History unfortunately has proven this to be true.

But that was the time to seize new opportunities, to look at what we all did but with fresh eyes. While the Aussie dollar tanked at \$0.50, our USD contracts grew in real terms. Despite currency differences, a Big Mac was still cheaper in Chicago than in Sydney and Macy's offered a 10% discount on all purchases, even sale items, to holders of a foreign passport.

And, what I think is the greatest marketing initiative, United Airlines increased the space between seats on its long-haul flights. Half empty planes looked almost full, and the extra leg-room attracted more passengers to the roomier economy class seats.

We are now faced with the same uncertainty and the same need to rally together, to circle the wagons, to think and do things differently. We need to be ahead of the curve before the recovery takes effect.

As a result of the early strategic action VUSA had the jump on the rest of the world in sending Aussie tourists back to the U.S. From 11<sup>th</sup> place in the list of overseas travellers to the U.S. we soared to 6<sup>th</sup> and were officially recognised by the U.S. Commercial Service for Increasing Opportunity Through Trade.

I urge everyone to not wait for the pandemic to be declared over but to plan and act now, as NFP's we need to be ready more than ever to embrace technology, to do things smarter, to seize every opportunity that presents itself.

If this strikes a chord with you, please reach out or share within your network or community. I'm happy to meet, bump elbows and share ideas or just chat over coffee. Together we can stay ahead of the curve and place our organisations in the best position to lead the recovery.

P.S. I predict the 'New Normal' post the pandemic will include fever checks along with the current explosives and weapons checks before boarding any aircraft or cruise ship.

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