E-Passport, E-Visa Market Is Expected To Reach A New Feat Of Service Excellence Through AI

By Sandhya Michu — On Oct 15, 2018

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)

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Shikhar Aggarwal, JMD, BLS International, the largest service providers for outsourcing of visa, passport, consular, attestation and citizen services to Governments and diplomatic missions globally since 2005 talks about how the operational uplift in the visa industry has been triggered manifold on account of AI algorithms, cloud computing and machine learning.

Importance of data security in visa industry and how things have been changed post GDPR

The significance of privacy and data security has expanded tremendously with the emerging trends in technology. For a global visa, outsourced player such as BLS International Services abiding by the directives of data security and embassy protocol becomes integral. The organisation values and ensures the privacy of all its stakeholders. Its data protection policy is in compliance with all the applicable provisions of European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), along with amendments, if any. The privacy policy of the organisation encompasses all the details regards to processing of personal data along with legitimate grounds of data collection, retention and protection.

Emergence of Artificial Intelligence and how applying latest technology is creating new opportunity and stringent administration

The visa industry is using AI in advantageous forms like online appointment booking, mobile biometric services, e-Visa and allied contact centre. Taking ongoing rise of global e-passport and e-visa market into account, the said industry is expectant to reach a new feat of service excellence through AI.

There's no denying that adoption of AI is picking up pace in various sectors, including visa and consular services. According to industry experts, nearly 80% of businesses are investing in AI, and by 2020, more than 50% of the operations and enterprise data will be managed autonomously. Many software professionals and experts believe that practising AI across several industries will give AI software potential revenues a phenomenal ascent up to $90 billion by 2025.

Can you tell us about the emergence of E-visa: trends and opportunities

Decades back internet was just a wide spread reaction to the cyber world but is paramount to any industry today. Concepts like digitisation, electronic passport and e-Visas are driving industry veterans towards a new milestone; on that note, BLS e-Visa solution also walks no poles apart. Issuance of e-Visa was brought into practice to incite the travel and tourism sector in India, connecting the border control systems to the central visa database. Besides, Indian Missions have introduced range of visas last year including film visas, e-medical visas, e-tourist visas and e-medical visas simplifying the visa issuance process. Today, the growing trend of e-Visa is at embryonic phase for Indian outbound voyagers inviting a huge scope for authorised travel agencies appointed by the respective Missions.

What is the India expansion plan on visa?

In visa sector, a lot of tenders are coming out globally. So, we are very aggressively working with foreign governments, applying for tenders and even specific tenders that come out locally and we feel that in the next 1-2 years, we should add quite a few accounts. For Spain, we have also introduced mobile biometric. After we took over the Spanish visa work, the application counts grew by over 50 per cent.

What is your current operational profile?

We have 9,000 people working for us including in the e-governance. We have over 2200 offices in 62 countries. There was a change in the contract from the Punjab government. Before, we were operating 2000 offices in Punjab. Offices which had low footfalls have been transferred to other centre. This means the number of offices got reduced but there is a talk to extend as the number of applications will remain the same. We are in similar sorts of talk with other state and countries governments. We wish to take this model to abroad. We are handling more than 50,000 applications daily in the Punjab.

What is the expectation for the 2018?

The contract we bagged in 2016 is getting matured so the application count is growing 10 per cent per annum. This year, we got a contract from Sopra Steria that enables visa renewals for those individuals who are already in the UK. There would be increase compared to last year definitely. We expect more than 5 to 10 per cent growth. As different contracts came in at different time periods, this year will not be captured for all contracts. Hence, the growth will not be more than 10 per cent.

Where do you see BLS International in the next five years?

In the next 5 years, we see ourselves growing more. In last 4 years, we have growin 40% CAGR. As the company grows bigger, it will be difficult after a certain size to maintain the same level of growth. But, our aim is to maintain the same level of growth. Every year, we are aggressively focusing on bidding for lot of tenders. We aim to add some tenders every year.

How outsourcing of visa issuance and administrative task has expedited and smoother the visa processing for governments and applicants

There's no denying that digitisation has made global travel easy and comfortable. Obtaining e-Visas is a seamless process compared to the intricate processing of conventional visas. Thus, it has become imperative for all such outsourcing service providers to comply with a rigid verification system to safeguard the personal information of their visa applicants.

Moreover, citizens are demanding better services and governments are looking to reduce costs and increasing bandwidth. So, outsourcing of services comes as an obvious solution. It gives specialised service to the customer with latest technological advancement and reduced paperwork for the embassy.

Significant driving factors of consular outsourcing –

- Growth in the number of embassies and consulates worldwide
- Government budget cuts
- Heavy administrative nature of visa processing
- Growth of visa applications with increasing number of travellers
- Policy problems (i.e. migration)
- Overcoming the negative image associated with visa application processing (i.e., long waiting time and queues in visa application)

- Future of visa outsourcing industry domestically and globally

How concepts like chatbots, language translation, and visual perception are leading the future of the visa outsourcing industry, both domestic and globally.

BLS International is poised to raise the spectrum of G-to-C services to a new level all together. With 31 million applications processed till date, the organisation has been consistent in delivering its service across 62 countries. Considering the integrated citizen service model into account, BLS International aims to add more value to bring agility and transformation in the visa industry.

Contact Centers and Artificial Intelligence (AI) has changed traditional operational practices very swiftly. Concepts like chatbots, language translation and visual perception are leading the future of the visa outsourcing industry, both domestic and globally. Many industry veterans opine that applying AI in the visa outsourcing industries will raise revenues up to $90 billion by 2025. In past, few years, the operational uplift in the visa industry has been triggered manifold on account of AI algorithms, cloud computing and machine learning.

Thus, it can be said that be it any form of data capturing, citizen services or customer interface, the need is to prioritise accountability and prevent applicant's data from any contravene. In order to render a delightful customer experience in visa services, the government should also join hand in executing focussed result-driven policies, legal processing and seamless technologies, which will not only uphold the future of visa industry, but help organisations to enhance customer reliability.