Exploiting Infrastructure for Future Passenger Growth

A discussion on the challenges facing the global aviation sector as passenger numbers continue to climb.

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The global aviation industry is facing significant challenges with the predicted growth in passenger numbers. In this article, Neil Norman from Human Recognition Systems, looks at how airports can maximise their capacity within the existing infrastructure by using smart technology to improve passenger flow.

Demands on the aviation sector are expected to double in the next 20 years and, as a result, a key challenge for airports is to consistently deliver more capacity at lower cost. In densely populated, developed countries, building new infrastructure is both costly and time consuming, often requiring lengthy political, economic and environmental debate. There are, however, less dramatic options available to airport operators which will enable them to increase capacity, improve customer services and increase revenue.

The key challenge in this market is getting people through the existing infrastructure, both in terms of numbers of passengers through the airport and numbers of planes arriving and departing. The two main methods of achieving this are automation and passenger personalisation.
A SEAMLESS, TECHNOLOGY-DRIVEN JOURNEY

Automation of processes is becoming increasingly commonplace for high volume people management. The ability to speed up processes and improve accuracy offers huge potential to the aviation industry. A perfect example of this is Fast And Seamless Travel (FAST) at Changi airport, Terminal 4, that is scheduled to open on October 31. However, new infrastructure is a luxury for airports that can afford substantial investment. Software that can talk to existing airport hardware is an alternative solution.

Processes requiring people are frequently slower and more cumbersome than those that are automated. Compare the airline check-in procedure we have now to that which was commonplace ten years ago. Automation not only speeds up the process but also helps to eradicate errors, improving accuracy and efficiency.

There are, however, significant hurdles to jump within the aviation space before you can successfully implement automation. A core issue is the disjointedness between airlines and airports, which don’t currently share passenger data, and consequently have alternative views of the passenger’s journey. As online check-in has become the norm for passengers, often the first time the airline receives information that a passenger is present at the airport is when they reach the boarding gate, despite their arrival at the airport hours before. The airport however, receives information that a passenger is present as soon as they pass through security.

Flight delays are caused by both passengers arriving late to their gate and the extended time taken by ground crew to board the flight, especially where ground crew availability is limited. As such, integration of airline and airport data through passenger automation technology can reduce delays and maximise operational efficiency. By avoiding duplication of processes, more flights can leave on time, increasing airport capacity and improving customer satisfaction.

IN THIS DIGITAL AGE, THE ‘CONNECTED’ PASSENGER DESIRES A SEAMLESS, PERSONALISED TRAVEL EXPERIENCE THROUGH THE AIRPORT
To alleviate the challenge of rising passenger numbers in the complex airport environment, personalisation is crucial. In this digital age, the ‘connected’ passenger desires a seamless, personalised travel experience through the airport. Regardless of industry, customers are more demanding of individualised and relevant experiences than ever before. With different profiles, preferences and destinations, it isn’t feasible for all passengers to be treated in a generic way. Airports must meet and exceed passenger expectations in order to remain competitive. This means treating passengers like guests and providing excellent customer service.

Passenger automation technology can enable personalisation by collating passenger data to provide a comprehensive view of passengers; from the moment they enter the airport; through to the bag drop, ticket presentation, security and boarding. This improves communication with the passenger, guiding individuals through the airport, giving more accurate timings at every stage and tailoring offers in the airport lounge. Provision of information can manage any potential anxiety and increase customer satisfaction creating a seamless process in which passengers can move freely from one checkpoint to the next.

By increasing passenger flow, personalisation allows the passenger to quickly pass through the airport checkpoints and spend more time enjoying the leisure and retail areas of the airport, providing higher commercial opportunities for airports in the form of higher retail spending. Ultimately, this has the potential to create a one to one relationship with the passenger, where the offering is unique and is communicated through the right channels at the right time.
BUILDING WITHIN THESE FOUR WALLS

The ability of technology solutions to talk to existing airport hardware will help to release the latent capacity which exists within current airport spaces. The increasing adoption of automation and personalisation will add to the speed of this process.

The industry needs to address the biggest hurdle to change which is that airports and airlines still treat each other as separate entities. Creating a seamless flow of information between the two will smooth the passenger journey, release revenue streams and improve customer service feedback.

Investment in new airport infrastructure is, at present, an unnecessary step to meet passenger demand but investment in technology to create an uninterrupted and pleasurable journey is paramount if air travel is to reap the benefits.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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REFERENCES

1 ‘IATA Forecasts Passenger Demand to Double Over 20 Years’