Customers expect to be able to manage their own journeys with the help of the latest technology and apps. To keep up with the ever-changing digital world, Air New Zealand embarked on a revolutionary self-service initiative. Group General Manager of Airports, Roger Gray, outlines the world-first biometric bag drop installation at Auckland International Airport.

IMAGINE an airport where everything is self-service, from the moment a customer checks in and drops off their bags, right through to when they board their flight. This vision of the future is fast becoming reality at many airports around the world, with digital technology changing the way customers experience our airports. Traditional check-in counters and their snaking queues are an increasing rarity since mobile and online check-in and self-service kiosks started giving customers the tools to take control of their journeys.

Self-service has revolutionised check-in and Air New Zealand took this a step further in December 2015 by introducing automated bag drops with world-first biometric technology at Auckland International Airport.

We wanted to complement our mobile and online check-in and kiosks with automated bag drops to create a complete self-service experience at our customers' fingertips. This has enabled our front of house teams to emerge from behind the check-in counter; meaning they can interact more freely with customers and support them through the process if they need help.

The automated bag drop technology has security and safety features, similar to that of SmartGate (or eGate) passport control facilities. They have been designed to replace traditional check-in counters and 13 of these units are now operational at Auckland International Airport.

**How it works**

Air New Zealand's automated bag drops and biometric technology are at the cutting edge of self-service, and they support our strategy of empowering customers and creating a more seamless airport journey.

The biometric innovation is an example of technology improving the customer experience. It speeds up the check-in process and improves security by using face-to-passport recognition when customers arrive at the automated bag drop.

Passengers place their heaviest bag on the scale to be weighed and use a touchscreen to scan their boarding pass and passport. Their identity is verified by matching images from the camera and biometrics with that of their passport.

The bag drop facility also takes a picture of the bag using imaging technology. This has the added benefit of helping Air New Zealand track bags heading to a particular aircraft and helps to locate mishandled bags.
BAG DROP FACTS

- Air New Zealand's automated bag drops have inducted one million bags in the year since they were installed at Auckland International Airport
- The bag drops induct an average of 80,000 bags every month
- December 2016 was a record month for the automated bag drops with 100,259 bags in total
- 23 December 2016 was the busiest day of the month with more than 4,200 bags processed
- It only takes around 60 seconds to process a customer's bag using a bag drop

A key design feature is the side-loading of bags, which is much easier than front loading and provides a safe and clear area for customers. This side-loading design also provides a less intimidating user experience for customers who are not familiar with the technology.

Bags are automatically checked by weight, dimension, volume and shape. Anti-intrusion systems use patented technology to prevent customers from being trapped in the unit and also protect the integrity of the weighing process. A series of tight curtains provide security by detecting people or objects entering the conveyor system. Advanced 3D analysis can also find problematic bags or multiple bags.

Once a customer's bag has been processed, the bag tag is activated and the bag proceeds through to the airport's baggage handling system.

Behind the scenes
Air New Zealand contracted ICM Airport Technics, a world-leading company in providing automatic bag drops and baggage handling solutions to airports and airlines, to install the automated bag drops. ICM partnered with Morpho (Safran) Identity and Security, a leader in biometric and digital identity solutions. The companies worked together on this biometric bag drop solution so that Air New Zealand customers could check in their baggage by themselves without having to queue at check-in.

The resulting product has vastly improved the bag drop experience at Auckland International Airport over the past year, and the team has made some enhancements to make the technology even easier for customers to use.

Agent or Self-service - The bag drop that does it all!

Self-service or conventional, ICM's best-in-class technology delivers the ultimate passenger experience.

- Fast automated self-service bag drop with payment and biometrics technology
- Advanced safety and security features
- Agent mode for a conventional check-in process
- Business continuity solutions in case of IT outages
- Convenient exception handling
- Chosen by the world's best airports

For more information on our latest bag drop solutions, please visit www.icm.aero
Technology, however, is only as good as the people who use it, so Air New Zealand’s front of house teams have also been on a journey of change whilst adopting the new bag drop technology. Training and digital support was provided so these teams could feel confident handling the technology and championing it with customers.

**Digital transformation**

Customers expect to be able to manage their own journeys with the help of the latest technology and apps. This means we are constantly innovating to keep up with an ever-changing digital and connected world.

The automated bag drops are just one element of a wider front of house upgrade and innovation programme to digitise the airport experience. This included overhauling the layout of Auckland International Airport’s check-in areas so the front-of-house teams can move more freely around the space and support customers, instead of standing behind a counter or computer.

Since introducing automated bag drops, Air New Zealand has started rolling out Bag Drop Lite to regional airports around New Zealand. This self-service innovation for bags enables our regional customers to simply scan, drop and go.

We have also designed Accelerated Boarding Control consoles so that customers can scan their own boarding passes. This self-service innovation has sped up the average boarding time for each customer from eight to between two-three seconds, which means gate agents can operate multiple gates at any one time. This will be rolled out across the network.

Another digital game-changer is Air New Zealand’s new Airband™ which has revolutionised unaccompanied travelling children. This wristband is embedded with technology that triggers text messages to parents or guardians letting them know where their young one is along their journey. 36,000 young travellers used it in the first year. The Airband™ has replaced a paper system with one that sends real-time information.

Air New Zealand’s lost and found property app is another important innovation that makes it faster to track down lost items by highlighting potential matches between items and their owners. This has eliminated the need for manual processes and increased the airline’s repatriation rates for lost property from 15% to 50% in one month alone.

Significant investment has also been made in the disrupt management system to communicate with customers through the Air New Zealand mobile app, by text message or via email, in the event that their flight is delayed. This includes a suite of messaging tools with the simple principle of allowing team members to focus on writing the message and letting the system worry about how to get the message to the customer.

We now send 60,000 messages to customers every month, including automated travel alerts for flight schedule changes and certain ticket events. Another channel is our manual travel updates that allow the team to send personalised updates to selected customers. We have added self-service to some of these updates with a link for affected customers to change their flights if they wish.

These new self-service options and the technology for bag drops as well as the rest of the airport experience are a huge leap ahead from the days of paper tickets and queues at check-in counters. The aviation industry needs to lead the charge into this bold new digital world, and keep innovating to stay relevant and make the customer experience faster and easier. Ready or not, the future of travel is here.