AIRPORT APPS

With passengers expecting real-time information and reliable connectivity at their fingertips, applications for smartphones and portable devices are frequently being introduced by airports. With a wide range of features, many airport apps offer passengers the ability to forward plan, check in, schedule parking and even purchase duty-free items before they arrive at the airport. Within this section of the magazine, we hear from three different airports regarding how they are using apps, and the feedback they have received so far.

The benefits of airport apps in a **technologically-driven** world

Tara Hernandez from Gerald R. Ford International Airport details how the airport's app drastically improves the passenger journey; ensuring flying from the airport is not a stressful experience.

IN TODAY'S world, being connected is as important as ever – the average American checks their phone 46 times per day, for everything including emails, phone calls, texts, social media and apps. Phones and tablets hold endless amounts of information, all designed to make our lives easier, make us more connected and serve our needs faster and more efficiently.

Think of the last time you travelled – did you check all of the above, plus your airline or airport's app? If your flight was delayed, you may have received a notification from the airline's app, or, if you were curious about parking or security checkpoints, you may have checked your airport's app. There lies the option of having all your needs met in one place.

Meeting the digital expectations
At Gerald R. Ford International Airport (GRR), we want to make the travel experience easier and better for those who choose to fly from our airport. Therefore, in September 2018, we launched our new mobile app. The app was designed to give travellers another way to connect with us and to make wayfinding around the airport easier and faster. It is designed to provide passengers with airport information before they leave on their journey to the airport, or to check on their way (safely, of course).

The Gerald R. Ford International Airport app features real-time flight departure and arrival information, updates on parking availability at the airport, and security wait times. Additionally, amenities such as food

and beverage locations, children's play areas, business centres, nursing rooms, and the Military Welcome Centre are all featured on the app. Passengers can also connect with the airport ground transportation options that are available.

Since its launch over a year ago, the app has been downloaded by thousands of people. We have heard from passengers and guests how it makes the pre-boarding experience far smoother by being able to see what is available ahead of time – such as food and beverage facilities, parking availability and security waiting times. Our airport passenger traffic has increased considerably over the years. We are the fastest growing airport in Michigan – having grown 88 per cent since 2009 – and last year

we served a record 3.26 million passengers. GRR currently serves 32 non-stop destinations on seven airlines, and we look forward to more options popping up on the map in the future. As our traffic has increased, so has our need for an expanded facility and more amenities, as well as the curiosity of passengers wondering how long the security wait will be, or, especially during the winter months, if there is any covered parking available. With our mobile app, travellers have that information at their fingertips.

"The average American checks their phone 46 times per day"

Developing GRR further

On 28 August 2019, the Gerald R. Ford International Airport announced Project Elevate, a three-stage expansion of the airport that begins with a $90 million extension of Concourse A to accommodate the expected passenger growth over the next 20 years.

Airport leadership is currently seeking federal approval for the second development of Project Elevate, which proposes to add a Federal Inspection Station (FIS), capable of screening international commercial passenger flights. The third development

will be to relocate the current air traffic control tower to make way for diverse terminal-area developments, such as additional tenant hangars and more parking, amongst other improvements.

The Ford Airport is also currently in Phase Two of the Gateway Transformation Project – a two-part development in which the first phase included consolidating the security-screening checkpoint, adding in new terrazzo flooring, lighting, restaurants, children's play areas, and more. Phase Two is set to be complete in spring 2020 and will include updates to the airline ticket counter spaces, new airline baggage service offices (BSOs), upgrades in the baggage claim area, and the removal of the TSA's CTX baggage screening machines from the public area.

Preparing for future travel

With so many exciting projects and developments in our future, we can expect technology to play a huge role. Wayfinding, amenities, ease of use and services will all play a part in what we do and how we serve our customers.

Passengers have told us that they love having the instant access of a mobile app and the ability to be even more prepared for when they travel. We all know travelling can be stressful, and this is one way in which we have tried to ease passengers' minds during that journey. We have also created an informative video to help promote our app and demonstrate to users the features it entails.

Tara Hernandez is the Marketing and Communications Director at the Gerald R. Ford International Airport, responsible for airport marketing, advertising, public relations and media communications, social media, air service development, event planning, internal/external communications, branding, community outreach and customer service.

In the future, we are hoping to add other highlights. Many of our facilities are currently under construction and, as we expand our footprint, we will be updating the restaurants, bars, shops and amenities that are available. Additionally, we have a section where passengers can provide us with feedback, as we are always open to hearing what they would like to say, or have them connect with us on social media.

Technology is constantly changing and it is important for our airport to be connected to our passengers – to listen to their needs and to respond to how aviation and airports can help make the experience easier and more enjoyable.

The convenience of having an airport app at your fingertips when you fly is important, as we live in a world with a 'need it/want it now' attitude. So, whether the traveller is a weekly business passenger who knows the minute details of the Ford Airport and wants to check security times, or they are a family destined for Florida for a winter getaway and are curious about parking availability, our mobile app is capable of meeting their needs. ■
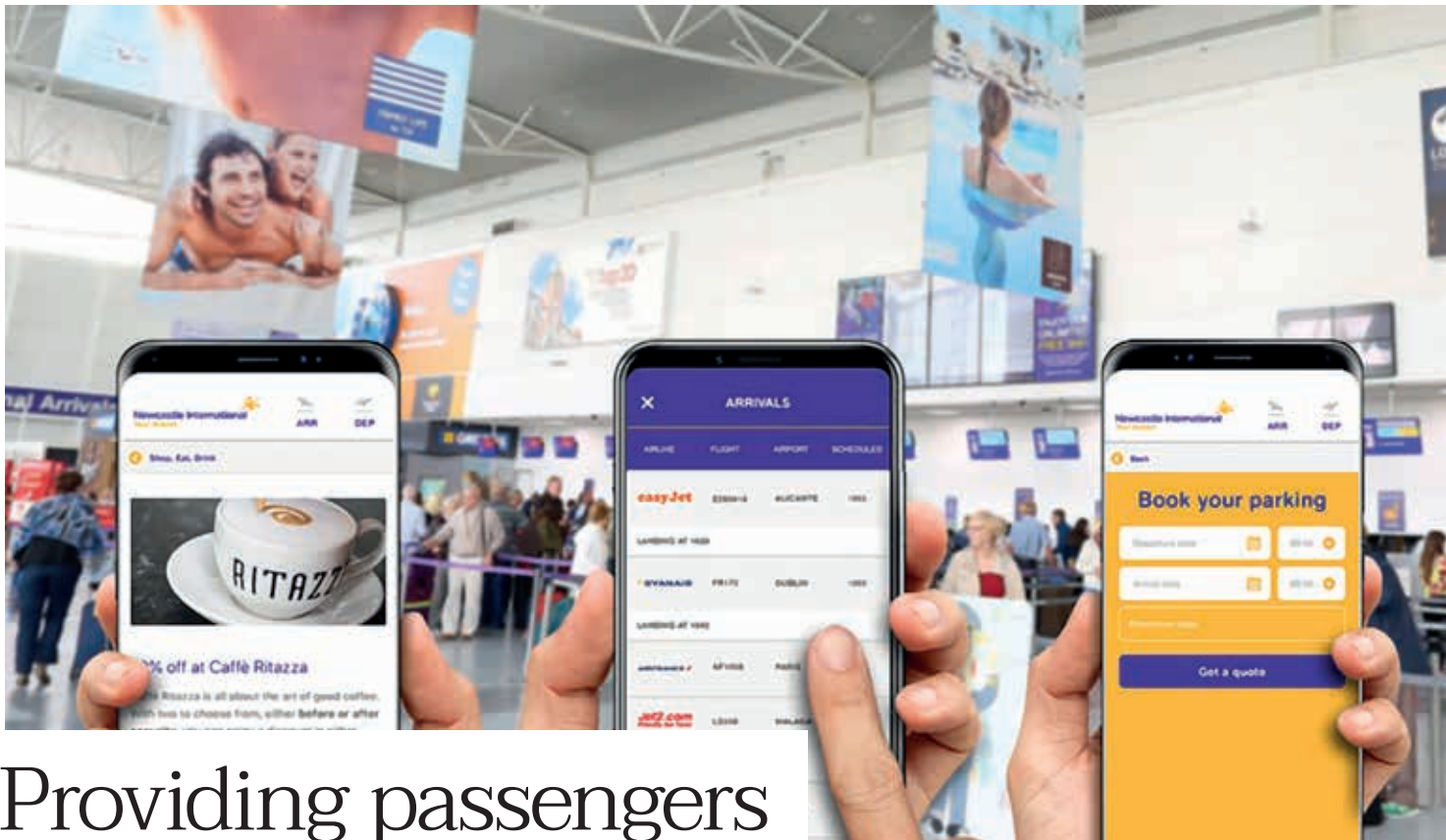
Providing passengers with peace of **mind**

Kate Hall, Marketing and Communications Manager at Newcastle International Airport, discusses how to develop a successful airport app and use it to create the perfect passenger experience.

IN 2018, almost 5.5 million customers passed through Newcastle International Airport's doors – the highest number in over a decade. With the intention of providing seamless journeys for these passengers, in July 2018, the airport developed their first official mobile application.

With the desire to be the UK's best airport, Newcastle International constantly invests in the latest technology to further improve customer service – and the *NCL Airport* app is one of the most recent initiatives to launch.

The app, which is the highest rated UK airport app in both the iOS and Android app stores, was designed to support the passenger journey from booking the flight, to boarding the aircraft.

App features
With over 80 direct destinations on offer from Newcastle, travellers can find inspiration on where to visit next by browsing through the 'Discover the World' page. Passengers will scroll down the page and learn about the airport's newest destinations, including Bergen, with Loganair, and Munich – which provides over 130 onwards connections through Lufthansa.

Then, once a destination is determined, passengers can book flights seamlessly through the app using the smart Skyscanner integration system.

Ahead of their trip, the app allows passengers to book lounge access and Security Fast Track, and stores all items together in the wallet-style 'My Bookings' section on the app's dashboard.

Passengers can also use the app to book into any of the airport's car parks, including the brand-new Premium Meet & Greet facility which is located just 30m from the terminal.

Pre-travel guidance, including security advice, check-in information and baggage policies can also be viewed in advance of the passenger's trip.

On the day of travel, the *NCL Airport* app can be used to receive real-time flight updates and alerts, providing passengers with the peace of mind that all the information they need is easily accessible on their phone. As check in opens, the user will receive a push notification telling them which check-in desk they should head to.

Using GPS technology, the app knows when the user is at the airport and changes the dashboard to show Wi-Fi connection instructions. App-users can obtain exclusive offers and discounts for the many shops and catering outlets within the airport.

Using a World Weather Online integration, the app provides the passenger with weather updates for their destination.

Developing the app
The expertly-devised application was a bespoke build by Newcastle-based agency
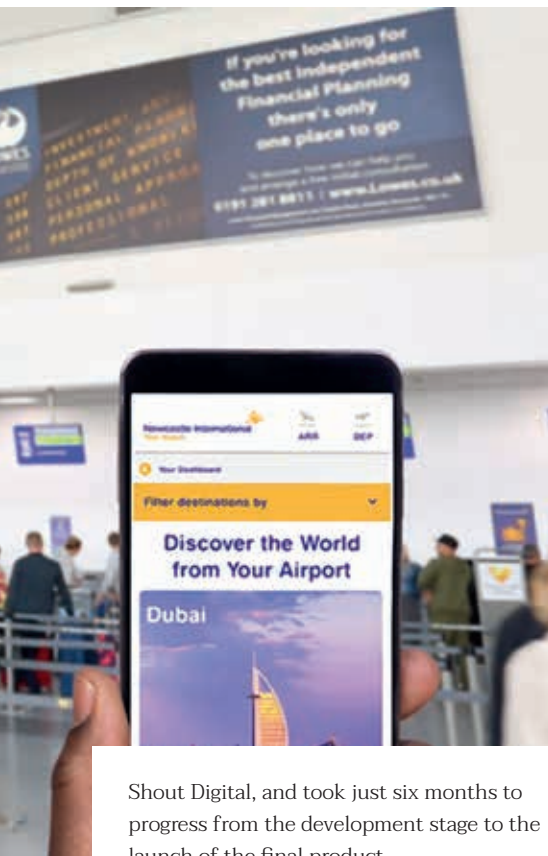
Shout Digital, and took just six months to progress from the development stage to the launch of the final product.

Tailored to meet the requirements of the North East travelling public, the airport's marketing and IT teams worked tirelessly to deliver the device in time for the busy summer season of 2018. As the product was brought to market, a multi-media marketing campaign supported the launch.

Social media also played an important role in the marketing of the app – and by using tailored audiences, the airport's marketing team were able to target adverts to those travelling soon, those already at the airport and those who have recently expressed an interest in travelling.

Using these specialist targeting techniques provided a high level of engagement and download rates.

Assessing the app

Thanks to the expertise of the marketing team, the app is on track to exceed expectations of its download target for 2019.

Every month in 2019, the app has achieved increasing numbers of bookings and revenue. Over 10 per cent of those who have downloaded the app have made a car park, Security Fast Track, or lounge booking, with the app providing a higher conversion rate compared to the airport's existing website.

Following the successful launch, the Newcastle International Airport app was highly rated on both the Android and iOS App Stores – scoring 4.3 out of five on both platforms.

Glowing reviews soon followed, with passengers branding the app "handy" and "well-designed", saying it had "great functionality".

One review read: *"Well thought-out app with great functionality. I used to have to go to various websites to do this but now I have*

Kate Hall, Marketing and Communications Manager at Newcastle International Airport

everything at my fingertips and in one place. Particularly handy for me to book lounge access and check arrivals/departures and book parking."

The airport team is currently working on a second phase of the app, which will see more functionality, improved tailored content and even more integrations for 2020. ■

Active on WeChat

Following the ever-increasing significance of social media, *Brussels Airport* discusses how branching out beyond standard social media channels can benefit both airport and passengers.

BRUSSELS AIRPORT has been active on leading social media channels, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram, for years in an effort to keep passengers as informed as possible about the ins and outs at the airport.

Recently, the airport decided to add a channel to this list: WeChat. WeChat is used mainly in China, and Brussels Airport created an account to be able to communicate easily with its Chinese travellers and help them find their way through the airport.

Unlike in the West, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are not among the most used apps in China: WeChat is the biggest player there. The app was published by Chinese firm Tencent in 2011 and is difficult to compare with an app we know in Europe. It comprises various apps such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and payment applications in to one. With WeChat, you can manage accounts and purchase or pay for goods and services, such as an air ticket or a taxi.

QR codes also constitute an important feature on the app. These codes are used primarily to add contacts and to pay for favourite purchases in a shop.

Chinese travellers cannot always use Europe's biggest social media channels in their country because of network security. To combat this communication challenge, and to ensure all passengers feel looked after within the airport, Brussels Airport made the decision to create a WeChat account.

In 2018, WeChat had 1.08 billion daily users. More than 50 per cent of these users spent more than an hour and a half per day on the app. Last year, approximately 45 billion messages were sent and 410 million calls were made daily. It is high time, therefore, to jump on the bandwagon of this popular app.

Passengers and visitors to Brussels Airport – that know a small amount of Chinese – should definitely take a look and scan the personal Brussels Airport QR code.

After six months of having the WeChat application live, the airport has gained approximately 500 subscribers. The goal is to reach 1,000 subscribers after one year of WeChat operation. Analysis has already occurred on the current subscribers, and it has been determined that a lot of the app users at the airport are transit subscribers; people who sign up and then drop out again. This is logical as it concerns Chinese passengers in Brussels who are looking for ad hoc information about the shops, the tax claim or a map of the airport.

To keep the app up to date, Brussels Airport works with a Chinese freelancer who publishes approximately four posts per month. The airport endeavours to continue using and updating the app to ensure all passengers are travelling through the airport with ease, and that the needs of the digitally-driven passenger are continuously met. ▪

brussels airport
the heart of Europe

Let's connect!
scan the QR code

Follow Brussels Airport on WeChat
and get all the info you need

Brussels Airport launched WeChat to ensure passengers from all over the world are well catered for within its terminal

@IntAirport

Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA) is a renowned international and regional aviation hub. Over 120 airlines operate flight services at HKIA to over 220 destinations worldwide, including about 50 Mainland destinations. Through continuous development of passenger and cargo services, a close connection with the Mainland China, and various commercial facilities surrounding the airport, HKIA is transforming from a city airport into an Airport City.

www.hongkongairport.com

Hong Kong International Airport