

MOBILISING PASSENGER TRAVEL

MOBILE CHECK-IN IS EXPECTED TO BECOME ONE OF THE KEY EARLY APPLICATIONS TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE INCREASED SHIFT IN MOBILE USAGE TOWARDS DATA-SERVICES. IBM FORECASTS THAT WITHIN THE NEXT THREE TO FIVE YEARS MOBILE CHECK-IN WILL OVERTAKE BOTH KIOSKS AND THE WEB TO BECOME THE MOST DOMINANT METHOD FOR TRAVELLERS TO CHECK-IN FOR THEIR FLIGHTS. **ROSS FALCONER** REPORTS.

As part of the IATA Simplifying the Business initiative, the target for 100% e-ticketing in 2008 has effectively been achieved. The next target is to eliminate the ATB magnetic stripe boarding pass by 2010 and move on to the 2D bar code boarding pass. "The value to the industry will be \$500 million by December 2010, through taking costs out of the check-in process. IATA figures are that desk check-in costs \$9 per passenger and kiosk check-in \$2.50. If we can make check-in self-service, then a lot of the cost is taken out," said Ronnie Forbes, chief technology officer, Mobaqa.

Mobaqa's Airline Product Suite is designed to streamline the passenger process through WAP, SMS check-in and mobi-pass, as well as supplying passengers with up-to-the-minute travel information with SMS alerts and the ability to click through a mobi-pass banner advert to book car hire. Through mobi-pass, passengers are sent an IATA-approved mobile bar coded boarding pass in the form of an MMS or WAP message. Mobaqa's Optimiser technology tailors the bar code specifically to the passenger's handset and mobile phone network. "The biggest challenge is ensuring that the technology works on all handsets," said Forbes. "We have a database of 1,600 handsets and a monthly process of testing new devices as they come onto the market. It is vital that the passenger gets a quality experience."

Spanair recently completed trials of mobi-pass and is awaiting Aena approval before full implementation. "By the end of May, we will be launching mobi-pass with a large US carrier and a Middle East carrier. This is very significant – it is the biggest international mobile boarding pass deployment to date," said Forbes.

BMI TRIALS REAL TIME MOBILE TECHNOLOGY

UK airline bmi is piloting Real Time's FirstPass, which delivers boarding pass information directly to passengers on their mobile phone, PDA or Blackberry, to help speed up the boarding process. The system went live on 12 May.

The airline has introduced FirstPass on selected domestic routes, including Heathrow, Manchester, Edinburgh and Belfast City, for a three month trial period with a view to rolling it out across the complete bmi network as mobile phone boarding passes are accepted by airports.

FirstPass uses mobile technology to encode a passenger's details within an industry standard 2D barcode. The boarding pass can then be read directly from the mobile handset by existing scanners installed at airports for paper-based 'print at home' boarding cards.

Alon Kronenberg, Practice Lead - Mobile Applications, Lead Architect, Toronto Innovation Centre, IBM Global Business Services: "Numerous airlines already have a mobile check-in that will allow for paperless travel subject to approval by the Transportation Security Administration (TSA)."



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UK airline bmi is piloting Real Time's FirstPass, which delivers boarding pass information directly to passengers on their mobile phone, PDA or Blackberry.

FirstPass removes the need for passengers to carry any type of paper-based boarding pass.

Alastair Deacon, Real Time's technical director, said: "The live testing of FirstPass is a groundbreaking development and means that during this trial period bmi passengers will always have their boarding passes available. Put simply, a passenger using FirstPass no longer needs to queue to check in, use a kiosk or even find a printer to print an online paper boarding pass. One MMS will give a passenger everything he/she needs to board an aircraft via security with additional information displayed as text for inspection once on board."

During the trial, bmi will use 'Picture Messaging' (MMS) technology to deliver a boarding pass directly to the passenger's mobile phone. Real Time's technology is designed to ensure that the boarding pass and 2D barcode are sized correctly for every mobile phone handset, PDA or Blackberry on the market.

Real Time has been working with IATA over the last two years to develop the standard that will be used by all airlines.

David Menezes, bmi's senior product and development manager, said: "We selected Real Time's FirstPass solution as the best implementation of the new IATA boarding pass standards and the simplicity of the solution for our passengers. Real Time's extensive experience of airline solutions, processes and project management ensured this ground breaking solution was successfully rolled out on the bmi network."

REWARDING USER EXPERIENCE

In the coming years as this platform and its users mature, the opportunity to leverage mobile devices will only continue to increase. "Faster devices with multimedia capabilities that are able to hold substantially more information will lead the way towards richer applications with more rewarding user experiences," said Alon Kronenberg, Practice Lead - Mobile Applications, Lead Architect, Toronto Innovation Centre, IBM Global Business Services.

He referred to the possibility of using the mobile platform to confirm menu choices while waiting to board the aircraft. "They could opt in to have personalised music playlists, new video games or favourite movies downloaded to their in-flight personal entertainment systems," said Kronenberg.



Mobiqa's Forbes outlined something similar. "Our vision is that passengers can follow a full range of services from an airline on their mobile phone. The idea is that passengers can prepay for inflight refreshments, so that they do not have to deal with cash onboard. A barcode on the mobile phone would be scanned to validate the purchase," he said.

The airline could also generate revenues by hosting logos relating to services such as hotels, car hire, etc. The passenger would be able to click through to make the actual booking.

Location based services could include dynamic maps of airports that would show travellers how far they are from their gate and where the airport Wi-Fi spots are. "While these are still the early days of the mobile revolution, with adoption still in its infancy within the travel industry, it is clear that mobile is here to stay and that soon it will become a critical channel in any airline's range of self-service offerings," said Kronenberg. "In support of these trends, IBM has developed a self-service roadmap for airlines and supporting multi-channel framework. The framework allows airlines to isolate business rules from channel specific logic, thus enabling the rapid deployment of new channels."

According to Forbes, airlines are embracing the technology. Mobiqa is also working with a number of partners, such as IER, on its initiatives. "Mobile check-in is demand driven. In our meetings with airlines, they have told us they would like it. It will definitely become the dominant form of check-in in the future. Mobile is the next wave after web check-in," said Forbes. "From what we have seen with event ticketing, there are initial adoption levels of 5-10% - it then grows quickly."

LEARN MORE ABOUT MOBILE CHECK-IN FROM PRESENTATIONS BY IATA, CONTINENTAL AIRLINES AND MOBIQA AT CHECK-IN '08. ➔

"The driver from the passenger point of view is convenience," said Ronnie Forbes, chief technology officer, Mobiqa. For the return journey especially, the passenger might not have access to a computer to print a boarding pass, so mobile technology is valuable.

