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The future of self-service in the airline industry

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The global economic crisis — coupled with increasing competition and rising customer expectation — has compelled the aviation industry to devise innovative and cost-saving solutions. As such, airlines all over the world are looking to technology to generate more demand and drive down costs.

Self-check-in services are helping airlines cut costs and improve customer experience. Moreover, according to IATA's 2009 Corporate Air Travel Survey, more than 50 percent of passengers worldwide want more self-service options. Customers feel more empowered while using self-check-in services and save time at the airports. Online check-in, kiosks and mobile technology are ushering in a new era of customer self-service, while self-service kiosks are increasingly becoming more and more popular, as proven by their increased usage. Kiosks are also working well in tandem with online and mobile technologies.

According to the SITA/Air Transport World Passenger Self Service Study, kiosk check-in usage is set to rise over the years and interactive kiosks will increasingly shift to the forefront of self-service. Kiosks not only benefit people who do not check-in online, but can also be used to provide multiple functionalities at the airport — like car rental or hotel check-in. Moreover, in the near future kiosks may become excellent avenues through which ancillary services might be purchased.

Another area where kiosks will play a huge role is in the process of self-tagging baggage. IATA, with its Fast Travel Program, will immensely improve and enhance passenger self-service through kiosks performing the functions such as printing bag tags, scanning documents, automating boarding gates and reporting missing baggage. Furthermore, the advent of CUPPS (Common Use Passenger Processing System) architecture — technology that enables airlines and handling agents to access their own applications from multiple workstations and peripherals throughout the airport that are shared by all users — will help continue to bring about increased efficiencies and cost savings.

In addition to kiosks, mobile technology will continue to take the world by storm. Mobile technology has a distinct advantage over kiosks — our mobile phone is always with us. It is thus very convenient to use one's phone for various services. Mobile phones can be used not just for checking in but also to complete the entire booking process. They can also be used for the sale of ancillary services like hotels, cars and also for timetables, notifications, alerts, social networking and much more.

According to a 2009 SITA IT Trends survey, 80 percent of the airlines surveyed are planning to offer mobile check-in capabilities by 2012. What's more, IATA has targeted 100 percent Bar Coded Boarding Passes (BCBP) by 2010. These facts alone guarantee the future of self-service technologies at the airport.



As network access speeds become ever faster and smart phones become increasingly powerful, the future of mobile services is poised to become even more popular than kiosk and Web check-in. Now, mobile check-in users consist of business and frequent travelers and smart phone users. However, this trend is sure to change as more and more leisure travelers are also purchasing smart phones.

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<http://www.selfservice.org/the-perspective/view/9993/the-future-of-self-service-in-the-airline-industry>