Collaboration for Best Passenger Experience Check-In of the Future

TH airport consulting

In today's airports industry, the emphasis on improved service delivery has received greater boost due to the positive impact of good service quality on the rating and more interestingly the bottom-line of airports. Importantly also, airports now pay closer attention to all aspects of passenger experience to deliver continued improvements that will retain existing passengers and attract many more passengers.

In Africa, while many of the existing State airports were established as extensions of government departments for social services, there has been strong advocacy for airports to operate as profit-oriented businesses. Though airports in Africa generally strive for improved passenger volumes and expand their capacities in anticipation of increased passenger throughput, the concept of analyzing and improving passenger experience is yet to be widely improved among African airports. Given this scenario, it is instructive to state here that the passenger is central to the success of any airport; and enhancing passenger experience should be at the heart of airport improvement initiatives in Africa.

Enhancing the passenger experience in the area of check-in is vital. Bad experience through airline dedicated check-in with long queues, for instance, can put off passengers. This raises the need for airlines and airports to collaborate for an enhanced passenger experience. Common-use facilities, self-service and off-airport options for check-in will be needed in the future to mitigate bottlenecks and to satisfy the individual needs of the passengers.
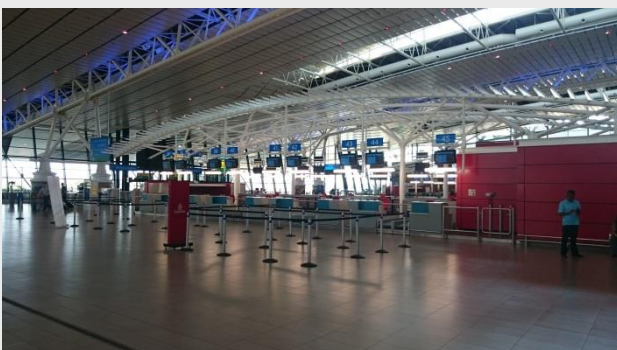
Adapting useful examples of how to improve passenger experience developed at other airports could help airports and airlines serve the passenger better. The Methodology to enhance the passenger experience outlined below (from the ACI EUROPE "Guidelines for Passenger Services at European Airports") could be helpful to systematically assess the needs and expectations of passengers and to develop initiatives for improvement.

Who Are Your Passengers?

In striving to improve passenger experience, airports may begin by defining who their passengers are through passenger identification and segmentation. It is also important to understand what expectations the passengers have to be able to meet and possibly surpass such expectations. In essence, airports and airlines should carefully analyze and not work at variance with the mindsets of their passengers.

3P Approach (Premises, Processes, People)

Enhancing passenger experience through the airport environment and architecture, airport processes and people providing services at the airports should align with the needs and expectations of the passengers. All the 3Ps need to be addressed in a systematic way to enhance the passenger experience for check-in.

Premises of the Airport

➢ *Short Walking-Distances with good Natural Way-finding to/from check-in*
➢ *Enhanced Ambience and Cleanliness of the check-in area*
➢ *Availability of sufficient Space for queuing and passenger movement*

Processes provided by Airports and Airlines

➢ *Efficient and reliable processes for Check-In and Baggage Drop-off with short process and waiting times*
➢ *Clear information to passengers on check-in options and processes*

People (Staff) at Airports and Airlines

➢ *Friendly, competent and reliable staff to carry out the processes*
➢ *Availability of staff for assistance*

Many passengers wish the difficulty of checking in can be reduced or avoided. Basic requirements, such as acceptable queuing and process times, have to be fulfilled. On top of that passengers expect that airports satisfy standard needs, e.g. the provision of self-service options, at a good level. But going a step further, passengers value it a great deal if airports exceed their expectation. Through these "wow-factors" an outstanding passenger experience can be provided. In this regard, the development of an airport specific pyramid with initiatives reflecting the needs and expectations of passengers would be suggested to enhance the passenger experience.
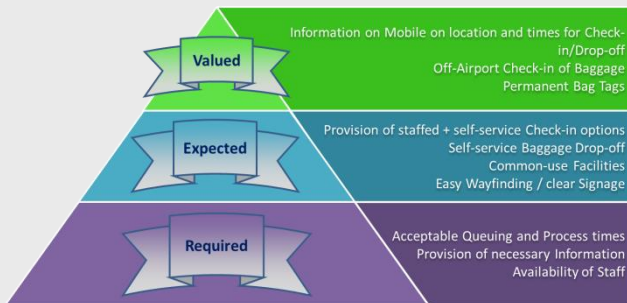
The Future - Technologies and Processes

Airlines encourage passengers to check-in online or airlines do that automatically. By so doing, most conventional check-In counters and kiosks will disappear. Use of technologies specifically enhances the passenger experience through online, mobile or automated processes. Check-in off-airport is also valued by passengers, as well as having separate priority check-in or even mobile agents for check-in and printing of boarding passes.

Notably also, check-in halls of the future will mainly be used for baggage drop-off, whereas common-use facilities will reduce queues. Self-service bag-drop devices will be available at most airports where passengers self-tag their bags before drop-off or already at home. Looking to the future also, some baggage will be checked off-airport (hotel, city office, station, home), while permanent bag tags allows individual tracking and information on time of receiving.

While there are new innovative concepts for check-in areas with a maximum of automation, importantly also current applications focus on the modification of existing halls.

Vision 2025: Check-In Hall of the Future

A vision for 2025 targets reduced sizes of check-in halls through a dominant share of common-use and self-service bag-drop facilities. Bag-tags will be printed at home or by mobile staff who also assist the passengers with the process. Staffed counters will mainly be reserved for special services as well as for priority passengers. The illustration of Vision 2025 shows a future check-in hall concept with significantly reduced size and optimized passenger flow.
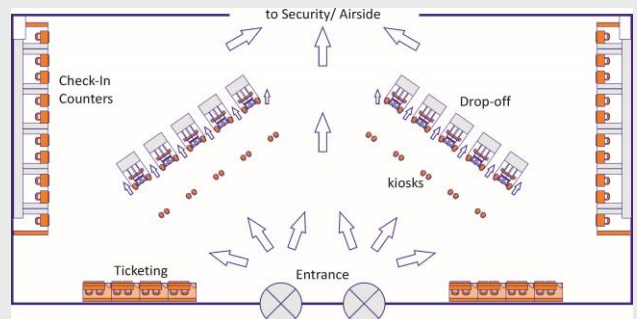
How Do We Get There?

To achieve enhanced passenger experience, it is vital to get to know your passengers and their needs and expectations. Essentially too, flexible design of the check-in hall is key to incorporate future concepts. We must consider that development just happens automatically since future generations will, for instance, prefer mobile devices for the management of trips; and future generations most certainly will grow up with contactless technologies.

The informed and empowered "Me Passenger" will enforce the transformation of airports. However, it should be noted that self-service will not completely replace staff since passengers expect to see people. VIPs, first and business class passengers and others require individual service with personal contact.

Overall, check-in of the future concepts will enhance the passenger experience, improve the utilization of resources, and will need collaboration of airports and airlines.

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