Air passengers want more digital technology, more control over travel processes

Results from the International Air Transport Association's (IATA) _2017 Global Passenger Survey_ (GPS) - providing insight into what passenger want from their travel experiences - showed that passengers expect technology to give them more control over their travel experience.

Topping the list were:

• Automation of more airport processes
• A single identity token for all travel processes using biometric identification
• Real-time information sent directly to personal devices
• More efficient security - without having to remove or unpack personal items
• More seamless border control

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> _Passengers have never been as empowered as they are today._

Ready to go digital

Digital travel processes are the expectation and passengers want more. The GPS found that 82% of travellers would like to be able to use a digital passport on their smartphones for as many travel activities as possible, from booking flights to passing through the airport. Biometric identification systems were the technology of choice with 64% favouring biometric identifiers as their preferred travel token.

"Passengers want to use one single biometric identity token for all their travel transactions from booking flights to passing security and border control and picking up their bags. IATA's One ID project is rapidly moving travel towards a day when a face, iris, or fingerprint will provide the key to a seamless travel experience. The technology exists. Its use in aviation needs to be accelerated. Governments need to take the lead by working with industry to establish a trusted framework and agreeing to global standards and security protocols needed to use the technology. One ID will not only make processes more efficient for passengers but allow governments to utilise valuable resources more effectively," said Nick Careen, IATA's senior vice president for airport, passenger, cargo and security.

Passenger in control

Passengers want to be able to do more of the airport processes themselves by taking advantage of the latest digital self-service options. Baggage was the top activity that passengers wanted more control over. The GPS found that 68% of those surveyed want to self-tag their bags with electronic bag-tags being the preferred option. In addition, 48% of passengers wanted to self-drop their bag.

The survey found that the number of passengers using automated immigration gates and kiosks increased by 6% in 2017, reaching 58% with a satisfaction rate of 90%. Boarding the aircraft was another area in which passengers wanted to have more control with 72% of passengers preferring to self-board, an increase of 2% over 2016.

"Passengers have never been as empowered as they are today. Self-service solutions range from mobile check-in and bag drop to self-boarding and automated border control. Smartphone- and tablet-toting, passengers want to use these mobile devices to control their travel experience. They expect easy access to the information they want, exactly when they need it in the travel process. Airlines and airports that make the most use of technological innovations will be giving a better travel experience to their customers," said Pierre Charbonneau, IATA's director passenger and facilitation.

Well-informed passengers

Passengers want airlines and airports to keep them informed throughout their journey. The survey found that 85% of passengers want to be able to check the status of their flight and 50% want to track their bag throughout the trip. Passengers also wanted more information to help them plan their passage through the airport with 51% wanting to know wait times at security and border control and 58% wanting to know wait times at arrival customs, a 17% increase on 2016.

Providing more real-time information was also identified by 63% of passengers as the key to improving their experience during travel disruptions. SMS messaging remains the preferred option for receiving travel notifications. However, this trend is reversing with 28% of passenger preferring communication through smartphone apps and 26% through email.

"Passengers expect to get up-to-date information on all aspects of their journey with minimum effort, through their preferred channel. Offering this level of personalisation is reliant on capturing, managing and understanding passenger data. But no single member of the travel ecosystem has the capability to optimise the end-to-end journey on their own. A global coordination framework is needed on how passenger data is shared, controlled and protected. The IATA personalisation programme aims to provide customers with trusted, accurate real-time information from all travel service providers throughout their journey," said Charbonneau.

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Passenger pain points

Passengers once again identified airport security and border control processes as two of their biggest pain points when travelling. The top frustrations were the intrusiveness of having to remove personal items (60%), the inconvenience of having to unpack electronic devices in carry-on bags (52%) and the variation in security screening procedures at different airports (47%).

To make security and border control areas as safe, effective and hassle-free as possible for passengers, the industry needs to embrace new Smart Security technology.

Bring your own device

The GPS found that 42% of passengers, would prefer to use their own devices - bring your own device (BYOD) - to access in-flight entertainment options. Greater connectivity promises to be a win for both the carriers and the passengers they carry.

"The importance of smartphone technology, the demand for more automation and personalisation throughout the travel process and desire to stay connected is not new to aviation, however, the GPS highlights the extent of the opportunities on offer and the need for airlines and airports and to invest significantly in this area. To satisfy travellers, airports and airlines will need to work together to provide passengers with easy-to-use mobile services, self-service options and one-stop security checks to make sure they meet this demand. But the industry can't achieve this alone. Government support is essential to change antiquated regulations before the industry can fully transform," said Careen.

The latest IATA Global Passenger Survey (GPS) is based on based on 10,675 responses from more than 152 countries across all regions in the world.