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Just Checkin' In

Congestion in India's airports as a result of the substantial rise in air traffic can be streamlined through effective self-serve check-in technology.

■ By Mark Canton | *Ascend Contributor*

An overall surge in air travel expected in India in the coming years will be fueled by more carriers entering the market, pushing airfares down to make air travel more affordable; improved air transport infrastructure, which will make the industry more efficient; and the continued growth of the Indian economy, providing citizens more disposable income.

The current volume of 15 million domestic air passengers a year pales in comparison with the rail passenger volume of more than 13 million — a day. However, air traffic is expected to grow to 50 million passengers a year in the next five years. Some industry analysts project that the number of commercial aircraft will grow from just under 200 today to more than 500 in the same five-year timeframe. As air traffic continues to grow in the coming years, airlines will need automated solutions to adequately process travelers.

With a middle class expected to grow to 400 million by 2010 and with new open-skies agreements and deregulation of India's air transport industry, many airlines are excited about the prospects of the India travel market. But, is there a catch?

The Challenge

Unfortunately, there is a dark side to all of this optimism — at least in the near term. The Indian government offered open-skies opportunities to the private sector in 1993, creating much-needed competition for the two state-owned airlines, Air India and Indian Airlines. The move resulted in the creation of new airlines, such as Jet Airways and Air Deccan, an overall decrease in the cost of air travel and an increase in consumer demand. But the cost of this liberalization in India has been severe congestion at many of India's key airports, most of which were built in the 1950s. Two airports — New Delhi and Mumbai — account for approximately 50 percent of India's air traffic.



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As newcomers enter the Indian market and air fares become more and more affordable, many of the country's residents are filling up India's airports, which are rapidly becoming overcrowded.

Unless Indian carriers take the necessary steps, increased traffic at India's airports will lead to longer lines at check-in, which could adversely impact customer satisfaction.

The Solution

By automating some of the check-in functions, airlines have the ability to provide an enhanced level of service while still controlling costs. Automating check-in functions offers customers self-service capabilities, freeing agents to handle special needs.

A tool such as *SabreSonic™ Check-in*, which provides components such as self-service kiosks and Web check-in can help carriers in India effectively manage traffic flow. The *Check-in* component's unsurpassed departure control capabilities simplify traveler processing, both on and off airport grounds, as well as provide the most definitive airport automation solutions available in today's transportation industry.

After implementing the *Check-in* component, airlines have realized resource cost savings of up to 20 percent, primarily through

staff re-allocation or cost avoidance achieved by eliminating the need for additional staff to handle operational increases. Airlines utilizing the *Check-in* component realize considerable benefits, including:

- Increased revenue opportunities — Faster check-in and shorter lines increase traveler satisfaction, resulting in repeat business.
- Reduced operational costs — Self-service options reduce the need for additional airport staff and enable growth at a lower cost.
- Optimized staff utilization — Enhanced traveler-processing options enable staff to improve service to customers outside of the traditional ticketing and check-in counters.
- Streamlined deployment — Airport traveler-processing solutions simplify application deployment and maintenance through an application service provider approach, ensuring uniformity across an airline's operational network.

For airports in India, the transition to self-service check-in alone, Internet and CUSS kiosks, could alleviate many of the symptoms of developing infrastructure. Processing passengers away from small, congested ticketing and check-in areas will streamline this airport-centric activity, helping key airports in India cope with the increase in passenger volumes

HIGHLIGHT

With a middle class expected to grow to 400 million by 2010 and with new open-skies agreements and deregulation of India's air transport industry, many airlines are excited about the prospects of the India travel market.

until longer-term infrastructure projects are completed.

Last year, the *Sabre Airline Solutions*® business worked with Jet Airways to deliver Web check-in capabilities for domestic travelers. And, early this year, kiosk check-in will debut at Mumbai's Santa Cruz Domestic Airport with a few check-in kiosks. Jet Airways will implement several dozen kiosks during the next few years to help improve the airport experience for its passengers and further differentiate the airline from an ever-increasing number of competitors.

Once perceived as added benefits, services such as electronic ticketing and self-ser-

vice check-in are now seen as standard offerings by seasoned business travelers across the globe. As India seeks to increase air travel to and from the country, these services must be considered and incorporated into the design of upgraded and new airport infrastructure. Fortunately, the groundwork has been laid and the Indian government and Indian airlines alike are working toward an improved airport environment to support a very bright future. ■

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