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Rapid Reaccommodation: Attaining Higher Levels of Customer Service

Advanced technology, such as Sabre Reaccommodation Manager, helps airlines quickly respond to flight cancellations and delays by efficiently rebooking customers on alternate flights.

■ By Apurva Mathur | *Ascend* Contributor

The odds are that it could happen to any number of airline passengers. Statistics show that one out of every 20 flights last December, specifically during peak seasons, was likely to be canceled either by weather, mechanical failure or some other unforeseen event. With almost 233,000 flights scheduled worldwide from Dec. 22 through Jan. 1, that amounts to more than 1,000 flights that would have been cancelled or diverted every day during one of the busiest times of the year.

For most passengers, a cancelled flight means much more than just a delay getting to their destination. It typically means standing in long lines at the airline ticket counter or being put on hold trying to find and book the next available flight. And some are also faced with finding new connecting flights to their final destination. For some, it might mean spending that important family holiday in the airport waiting for flight accommodations while folks gather anxiously for the arrival of their loved one.

Today, technology can minimize the impact of disruptions. For a passenger traveling from Houston, Texas, to St. Petersburg, Russia, via Chicago, Illinois, a flight delay could create havoc with an itinerary. If the original itinerary called for a connection in Chicago to London followed by a flight to Moscow's Sheremetyevo International Airport and then on to another flight to St. Petersburg, a two-hour delay in Houston due to a mechanical issue could cause the passenger to miss a connecting flight, leaving the passenger anxious and needing to know how to get to the next destination.

In situations like this, *Sabre® Reaccommodation Manager*, a new, advanced automatic passenger reaccommodation tool, can come to the rescue of airport staff, airline personnel, and, most importantly, airline passengers. *Reaccommodation Manager* was designed to deliver optimized and smart reaccommodation solutions when schedule changes occur, whether it is day-of-operations or long-term revenue management changes. The system has



Photo by Kamal Narang/The Hindu

Thick fog often contributes to flight delays and cancellations at the IGI Airport in New Delhi, India. Advanced technology can quickly help reaccommodate passengers when flight disruptions occur.

been developed by the *Sabre Airline Solutions®* business to revolutionize how airlines re-route passengers affected by disruptions and long-term schedule changes.

System Capabilities and Benefits

Reaccommodation Manager can help airlines recover from a number of unexpected events through a range of capabilities and benefits:

- Through automation, standard procedures and optimization, the system helps airlines quickly reaccommodate customers during flight disruptions.
- The Web-based tool enables airlines to review and manage flight disruptions and impact on passengers in real time.
- The system generates multiple solutions by prioritizing passengers and optimizing network availability.
- The tool works directly with reservations and departure control systems to obtain passenger name records and availability data.
- The solution helps airlines manage day-of-departure and revenue management flight

schedule changes.

- The system integrates with *Sabre® Movement Manager* to acquire the latest flight schedule changes.
- The tool offers quick, optimal solutions that are readily deployable, including optimization with “what-if” scenarios and the ability to define business rules for reaccommodation.

One of the key benefits of *Reaccommodation Manager* is the rapid rebooking process that is based on specific parameters, such as customer value, class of service, frequent flyer status and special passenger requests. The system provides passenger coordinators with a simple three-step process to understand, manage and rebook entire itineraries during disruptions. *Reaccommodation Manager* was designed to handle multiple disruptions at a time, rebook the vast majority of airlines' customers and eliminate the need for sequential rebooking. During times of disruption, frontline staff and customers will be informed promptly of new flight details, and customers will be able to receive their rebooked flight details



via short message service, e-mail and other electronic means.

For passengers, the benefits of an airline using *Reaccommodation Manager* become immediately apparent. With the system, the traveler would walk up to a self-serve kiosk to get her tickets and find her revised itinerary displayed. *Reaccommodation Manager* would look at her itinerary end to end and run through all the possible flights departing Houston and heading toward Europe, possibly via connections within the United States, and on to her final destination of St. Petersburg. The system has the ability to solve the problem in several ways, including:

- Booking a passenger on a Lufthansa flight from Houston to Frankfurt connecting in Frankfurt to St. Petersburg,
- Booking a passenger on a flight to New York from Houston and connecting on a flight to London Heathrow and then to St. Petersburg.

The system would look at the itinerary of every passenger on the British Airways flight to London Heathrow and review each passenger's customer value, frequent flyer status, fare paid, etc. It would then build revised itineraries based on each passenger's origin-and-destination information using airline-defined parameters. In a matter of minutes, *Reaccommodation Manager* enables airlines to sort through all possible flight options to determine the best alternative for cancelled or delayed flights. The system automatically books the substitute flight, issues a boarding pass via an airport kiosk or at home via the online check-in tool (or even in flight if the airplane is equipped with an on-board printer) to inform travelers about cancelled connecting flights — and all this can be achieved without customers ever having to talk to a gate agent.

Reaccommodation Manager also provides airlines the ability to determine the impact of changes to a long-term schedule for booked passengers. For those booked on flights that are impacted by future schedule changes, airline coordinators can use *Reaccommodation Manager* to quickly find the best replacement flights to get passengers to their final destinations. The tool can also be used to evaluate the cost of rebooking passengers prior to making the schedule change.

Who Will Benefit?

Several areas within an airline as well as customers will benefit from the rapid response of *Reaccommodation Manager*, including:

- Revenue management — Enables airlines to rebook passengers for seasonal schedule changes in addition to day of departure,
- Passenger coordinators — Enables them to participate in the decision-making process of flight cancellations and delays,
- Airports — Provides information in a timely manner about passenger rebookings,




Reaccommodation Manager can quickly identify passengers who have been impacted by a schedule disruption and run a series of scenarios to determine the best reaccommodation options.

- Operations control — Evaluates passenger impact of a cancellation or delay in what-if mode,
- Customers booked on a combination of international and domestic flights — Provides true origin-and-destination rebooking, not just for the affected flight segment,
- Customers whose itinerary includes host airlines as well as other airlines during day of operations — Rebooks passengers on other airlines even though the impacted flight is on the host airline,
- Highly valued customers (platinum, gold, frequent flyer) — Provides consistent, high levels of customer service.

Air New Zealand became the first airline in the world to select *Reaccommodation Manager* to ease the plight of passengers whose traveling plans are disrupted by flight delays or cancellations.

"We strive to offer world-class customer service and are constantly looking at ways to ensure our passengers receive the

very best experience every time they book and fly with us," said Rod Butchers, manager of operations delivery for Air New Zealand. "By adding *Reaccommodation Manager* to our existing portfolio of *Sabre Airline Solutions* technologies, we aim to deliver a superior level of service by reducing the problems associated with flight disruptions. For example, passenger rebooking can be taken into consideration when we decide if a flight needs to be cancelled, delayed or diverted to alternate destinations. And when we do have disruptions, it is stressful for all our passengers and staff. In the time it takes to rebook passengers, long lines at the airport form and customers become frustrated and demand to know what is happening. We are trying to take that stress away." 

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