

Travel Innovation: Creating a First-Class Airport Experience

Major Opportunity for Airports to Better Align
Technology Investments with Travelers' Needs

Author:



Executive Summary:

Customer acquisition and retention is harder than ever before. Every time an airport rolls out a new service, it raises the bar (and travelers' expectations) – putting increased pressure on other airports to adopt new technologies, or risk losing customers. This peer pressure raises many questions for airport executives, especially when budgets are tight, including:

1. How does our airport stack up against top competitors?
2. What technologies will impact the traveler experience most?
3. What mobile functionalities do travelers expect from airports?

Boston-based FlightView conducted a research survey of more than 2,600 business, frequent and leisure travelers across the U.S. to find out what technologies they really want and expect from airports.

Survey Demographics

Total respondents: 2,682

Respondent breakdown: 25.8% business travelers, 20% frequent travelers and 54.2% leisure travelers.

Demographic breakdown: Business traveler (travels regularly for business), frequent traveler (travels at least once a month) and leisure traveler (travels sporadically throughout the year).

Mobile Devices: What are Airport Customers Using?

The explosion of new devices has fueled a fundamental change in the way people travel, which will continue to evolve as adoption of new devices grows. Today:

- o Smartphones are the most popular device (81.5%) used by travelers at the airport.
- o 36.8% of travelers are using tablets while flying, and perhaps surprisingly, only 38.2% of travelers are using personal computers. FlightView expects tablet use to surpass the use of PCs by 2013.
- o Nearly 20% of travelers bring e-readers to the airport.

Breaking it down by demographic, frequent travelers are taking the lead when it comes to using tablets (42.6%) and e-readers (22.5%) while traveling. Business travelers still prefer using personal computers (48.2%) – second only to smartphones.

Airports have a major opportunity to improve customer satisfaction by catering to travelers' technology inclinations. This includes:

- o Making airport WiFi more readily available, reliable and cost effective
- o Offering [mobile access](#) to flight, travel and airport information
- o Enabling traveler self-service through mobile devices
- o Increasing the number of charging stations in terminals

WiFi: A Missed Opportunity for Airports

WiFi access is a top priority for many travelers, but despite strong demand and recent deployment efforts, airports are coming up short.

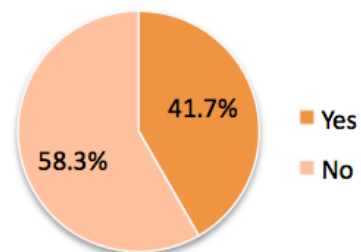
Only 41.7% of travelers surveyed are satisfied with the availability of WiFi at airports today. The problem is magnified when analyzing feedback from those who travel most frequently – where only 30.4% are satisfied with airport WiFi.

Travelers' biggest complaints: Airport WiFi is too expensive and unreliable.

Given the amount of time travelers are spending at the airport these days, investing in WiFi services is a sound strategy for improving customer satisfaction. In fact, 69.1% of those surveyed said they arrive at the airport 1-1.5 hours ahead of their flights, and 22% give themselves more than two hours.

With so many customers traveling with WiFi-enabled devices, expectations around the availability and affordability of WiFi are rapidly climbing, making this an opportunity to rise above the competition. [Many airports](#), including Denver, Las Vegas and San Francisco, are actually choosing customer satisfaction over ancillary revenue opportunities – by providing airport visitors with free WiFi access.

Are you satisfied with the availability of WiFi at airports today?



Mobile Travel Information in High Demand

While mobile websites and apps are not new, many airports are falling behind and missing a major opportunity to increase customer loyalty, traveler service and sales. FlightView estimates that only 50% of U.S. airports currently have mobile websites.

Now that the market for [mobile solutions](#) is advancing, it's no longer enough for airports to have a mobile website or native app. Today's travelers expect advanced functionality that makes their travel experience easier.

Here's a look at the kind of travel information customers want pushed to their phones while waiting at the airport:

- o 93.6% want flight status information
- o 73.2% want boarding alerts
- o 39.8% want coupons for terminal restaurants and shops

In other words, travelers want information that's critical to their trip.

Driving Customer Loyalty through Mobile Self Service

Eliminating the stress associated with connecting flights is another way airports can leverage mobile devices to increase customer satisfaction and loyalty.

FlightView's survey found that when on the first leg of a connecting flight:

- o Nearly 93% of travelers want flight status and gate location pushed to their phones before landing
- o 62.2% of travelers would value walking directions from their arrival to the departure gate
- o 30.2% of travelers want information on easily-accessible food and beverages

Very few airports currently offer gate-to-gate walking directions for travelers with connections. The demand for this functionality is highest among leisure travelers (70.7%), who are often less familiar with airport terminals. We expect demand for mobile terminal maps to increase sharply over the next few years, along with interior navigation and wayfinding – allowing customers to view their location and receive directions to another area in the airport.

In addition to maps and wayfinding, powering other self-service activities is a great opportunity for airports.

- o Almost 36% of travelers want the ability to book ground transportation via mobile
- o 30% of travelers want to easily share flight information via social media, text and email

The bottom line: Whether it's staying informed, booking ground transportation or quickly finding their way to their favorite coffee shop, travelers want mobile functionality and information that makes their airport experience easier, less stressful and more productive.

Delays and Cancellations: Further Improving the Airport Experience

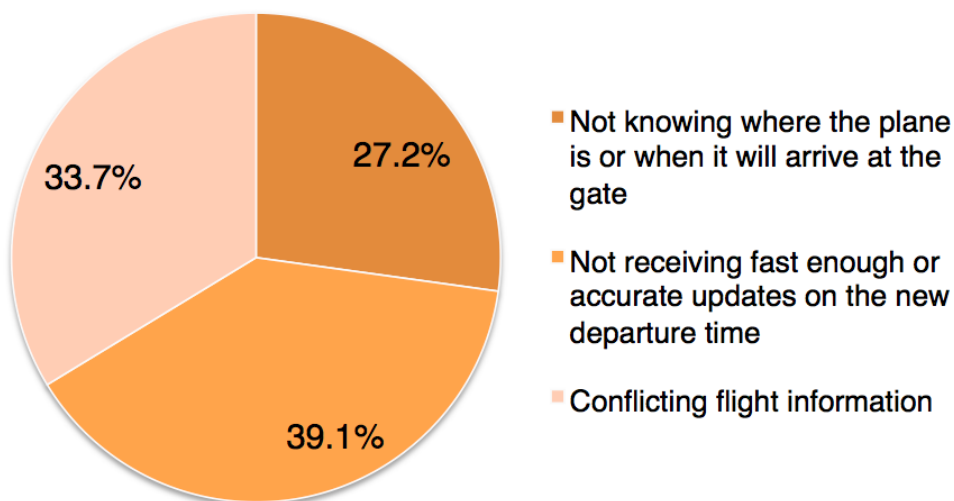
Every delay and cancellation is an opportunity to gain or lose credibility with customers, and while delays are often unavoidable, providing real-time, accurate flight information goes a long way in easing travelers' frustration.

While a lack of updates is the most significant issue when flights are delayed, conflicting information is also frustrating to travelers. More than 66% of all travelers surveyed received conflicting flight information while at the airport (different updates from gate agents, terminal displays, websites, apps, etc.). For those who travel regularly, the problem is even more pronounced, with more than 75% of business travelers and 73% of frequent travelers reporting receiving conflicting flight information during their travels.

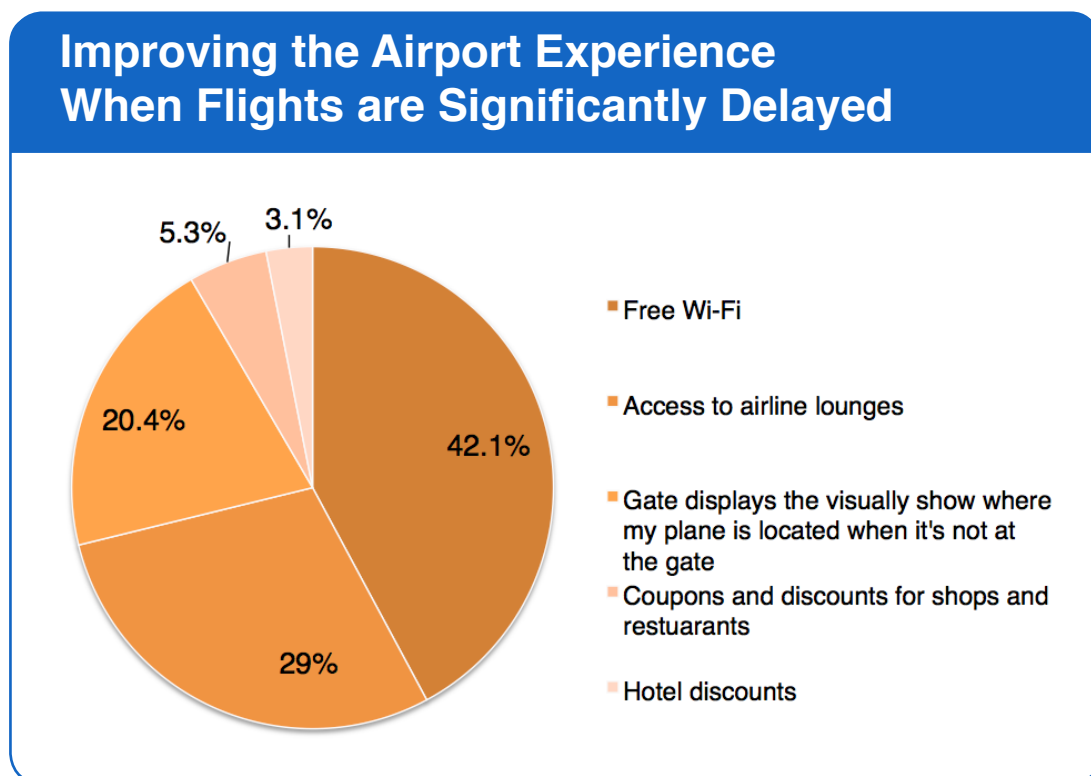
Interestingly, when there is conflicting flight information, only 21.1% of travelers trust terminal displays. The trust issue likely resides with slow updates to the terminal displays, which can be exacerbated when a flight's departure time is constantly changed. In 2013, FlightView expects innovative [airports and airlines](#) to start offering more than just Estimated Departure Times (EDTs) on gate displays and also show where the inbound aircraft is currently located on a map when it's not at the gate. This provides useful information that sets travelers' expectations and helps them estimate when their flight will depart.

Here's a look at how these frustrations compare against each other.

What Frustrates Travelers the Most When Flights are Significantly Delayed or Cancelled?



How can airports improve customers' experiences when flights are significantly delayed or cancelled? The chart below provides some ideas.



Regardless of how long a delay is expected, airports need to provide real-time, accurate flight information and proactively update customers when changes occur. Also, when flights are significantly delayed, providing customers with the amenities they need to be productive (e.g. easily available and free WiFi) and entertained (e.g. coupons and discounts for shops, restaurants and airport hotels) goes a long way in boosting their satisfaction and keeping loyal, life-long customers.

Where Do Airports Go From Here?

The opportunities are vast. Where should airports begin?

1. **Expand mobile offerings.** Pertinent airport information must be delivered to a wide range of individuals – from passengers and the people picking them up and dropping them off to airport employees, ground transportation providers and third-party support. All of these groups use mobile devices inside or en-route to the airport and expect mobile access to relevant day-of-travel information and self-service capabilities.
2. **Invest in WiFi infrastructure.** Limited access to WiFi impedes a traveler's productivity and airport experience. Enhancing the service is critical for keeping customers satisfied and loyal.
3. **Generate revenue via ancillary services.** Airports are becoming more retail-oriented in their appearance and offerings, and should take advantage of mobile coupons and WiFi portal discounts to generate ancillary revenue.
4. **Communicate flight changes.** Reliable and proactive communication is at the core of easing customer frustrations in times of delays and cancellations. Airports need to collaborate better with airlines and third parties to ensure that all public-facing information is consistent, accurate and up-to-date.

About FlightView:

FlightView, the top provider of day-of-travel information and services for the aviation and travel industries, is at the forefront of helping airlines and airports increase customer satisfaction, retention and revenue. FlightView's customer list has grown to include over 120 airports, several major and mid-sized airlines and other travel related companies who employ FlightView information in digital displays, Web and mobile sites, native apps, and other technologies. For more information, visit FlightView.com.

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