

Streamlined and slightly unreal, the SSDOP could be the future

# Easing the strain

If the following concept is anything to go by, then baggage handling is rapidly coming of age.

**H**ow can you increase your check-in capacity and improve the passenger experience without the need for large terminal investment? This was just one question that Schiphol airport asked itself when it came to consider the way forward in terms of passenger check-in and bag drop-off.

With the arrival of the self-service kiosk in today's airport has come a breath of fresh air: here was a seamless process that would put the passenger in charge of his or her destiny and take away reliance on counters and queues. It pleased IATA, whose work towards the paperless journey was one step closer; and it pleased the frequent traveller, who was unfazed by this new technology. Even the casual passenger, too, has slowly come to accept the encroaching forest of kiosks that typify many of today's airports.

But whilst the kiosk concept has gained ground, there was still a missing link in the efficiency chain. Despite airlines introducing fees for extra baggage, people still take luggage to airports; and there remains the need to manually check in the said luggage via a third party, which negated many of the kiosk's benefits.

But possibly not for much longer.

Whilst automated full self-service check-in is the future, it's currently being trialled in Holland. The so-called BagDrop facility allows the airport

to increase its check-in capacity by up to 80%: this is through a faster processing time coupled to a smaller footprint when compared to conventional check-in procedures.

Because passenger check-in no longer depends on staffing of desks, the operator can now maximise the available capacity each day and every day and minimise passenger waiting time, thereby improving the passenger experience and increasing the revenue per passenger.

## Swift and simple

The system is perhaps best not described as revolutionary but rather as the natural extension of the self-service kiosk. The application can be set up as a single, stand-alone unit; it can be arranged in pairs or in multiples and there is even the possibility of linking up units with gates or barriers to form a bank. Its modularity is consequently appealing to the airport architect.

Using the application is a straightforward exercise. A familiar touchscreen allows the passenger to key in flight data, show an identity card or similar and answer the usual security questions. A wire mesh retracts at the front of the machine to allow the positioning of luggage which is then automatically weighed and a barcoded bag tag subsequently printed. Once this is attached, the bag can then be sent on its way for scanning and further handling. For safety reasons, controlled access and child/ or animal detection is built in to the equipment.

Taken to its ultimate conclusion, with this innovation the operator has the flexibility of

setting up a remote check-in, for example in a car park or at an hotel. It goes without saying that BagDrop allows the operator to subsequently reduce operating costs through minimising the need for personnel whilst concurrently improving the quality of the baggage drop-off process.

There are other factors to consider, too. The pay terminal offers the operator the option of recovering the cost of overweight bags. The bag is photographed, further processed in a controlled way and then tracked from its moment of entry. Moreover, since full passenger and baggage information is made available, further information processing for system, liability or security purposes is also made possible.

The makers of BagDrop claim that it is easy to integrate with existing DCS and BHS facilities; further, it allows branding opportunities as well as a flexible integration with existing terminal design through the adaptation of the body shape, decor and lighting. The BagDrop system can also be fitted with a customer-specific body.

BagDrop Systems worked in partnership with Studio Linse for the design and INTOS for the bodywork, both of which are reputable companies with long and solid track records in the airport and other industries. In addition, Scarabee Systems & Technology provided the technical expertise, a company with in-depth experience in integration with BHS, DCS, security and specific airport and airline systems.

As ever, though, a trial is just the beginning.

## In practice

How has the innovation been received?

Betty Samola is Programs Manager at Schiphol and she was questioned on the trial.

"Most of the passengers are very enthusiastic," she relates. "They definitely appreciate the self-service baggage drop-off as an innovative feature in the departure process. We only started the pilot project in July but we have already serviced more than 3,000 passengers. The SSDOP can be used each day between 07:00 and 14:00hrs by ICI (Internet check-in) passengers with just one item of hold baggage which has to be under 20 kilogrammes. This is just the start. Of course, it could be possible to expand the requirements to a certain extent: we could go over 20 kilogrammes, for instance, and involve the integration of both passenger and baggage check-in. The pilot project will be officially

evaluated in October and will end in January 2009. Market research will start next August; however, the initial passenger response so far has been very positive."

Is this application easy to retrofit?

"If the question pertains to the ability to integrate the SSDOP with the existing check-in desk structure, the answer is yes, in the case of this pilot model. The pilot model was placed at the virtual end of the traditional check-in desks and can fit in quite easily. Of course, integration in other areas can be more challenging.

"Secondly, if you want to know if functionalities are easy to re-fit, the answer is yes again, but it depends on the features of the connected airline DCS. In the case of common use the possibilities to change functionalities are, of course, limited."

Does such an installation require a large investment?

"These figures are strictly confidential but yes, it requires a fairly large investment. The applicable business cases, however, show that there are genuine benefits, both in a qualitative and financial way. My advice would be to explore what the possibilities are for a joint venture together with other handlers, airlines or airports,


and thus effect joint or partial investments.

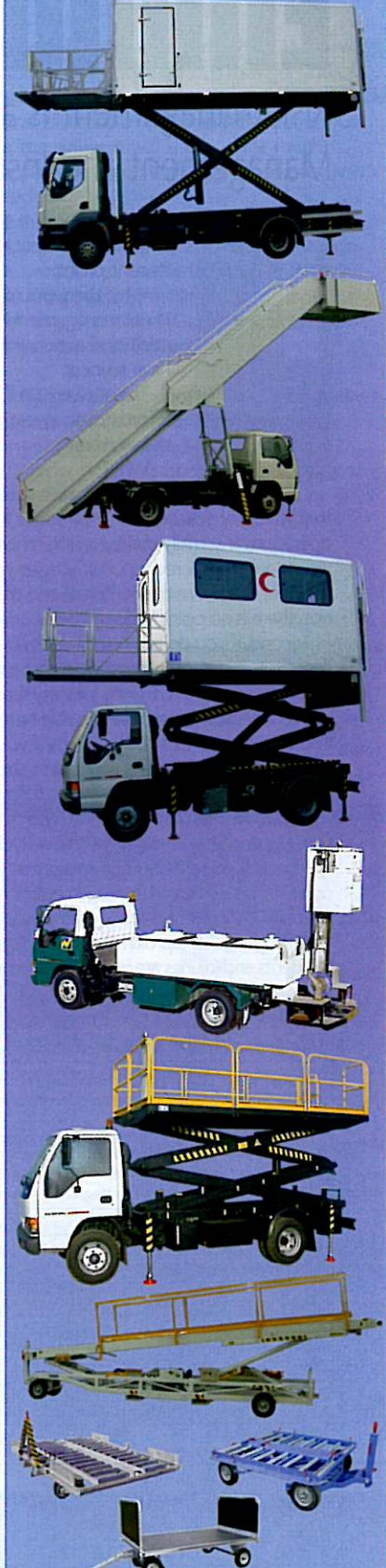
"As far as the situation at Amsterdam Schiphol is concerned, it is not our goal to change the traditional full service check-in process into a complete self-service activity immediately. During the pilot as well as the first implementation, staff will be needed to assist passengers. It is, however, our ambition to be as cost-efficient as possible. We therefore want to set up an operational management plan together with our stakeholders, focussing on optimising the availability of staff. For example, after implementation one assistant is needed per pair of SSDOPs; after one year, one assistant per four SSDOPs would be envisaged; and gradually, fewer staff will be needed for the assistance of passengers using the SSDOP. Staff can then be applied to, for example, high yield passengers who wish to have a personal service.

"In case of any malfunction we have SLA contracts with the SSDOP suppliers. The operational staff, such as KLM floorwalkers, are instructed in the carrying out of simple technical actions. After the implementation of SSDOP, assisted conventional check-in desks will always be a part of the departure process. These desks can also be used as back-up."



Keeping it simple was a priority for Schiphol's designers

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