THE CUSTOMER-CENTRIC AIRPORT ENVIRONMENT

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Aviation is a service industry and, like all service industries, customers have choices to make when it comes to their needs and expectations while travelling for business or personal reasons. Even if their choice of airports is still limited, customers will decide how they will spend their time and whether they will spend their money at airport facilities.

While customer choices will impact an airport’s bottom line, the choice airports make in terms of serving customers will have an effect on its revenues and its cost structure. This is why customer satisfaction is critical for airports.

Airport customers traditionally are thought to be passengers. However, “passengers” is not a name tag universally applied to all people who use an airport on a daily basis. Business passengers have specific requirements and expectations that will differ from leisure passengers. In addition, there are family, friends and colleagues who drop off and pick up passengers who also are exposed to and use airport services and products. Airport customers also include intermediary groups such as staff of airlines, concessionaires, tenants, governmental agencies, and the airport itself, to name a few.

Successful airports around the world have adopted a “customer-centric” approach and these results-driven airport environments stay close to their customers and understand their preferences in order to improve service, develop customer loyalty, focus operations and increase revenues. Airports can make smarter service investments by understanding their customers and aspects of their experience that impact attitudes, intentions, and ultimately behaviour.

There are several identifiable benefits of establishing a customer-centric and results-driven airport environment. An airport can quickly tarnish its image in the eyes of its customers, employees, and business partners if it fails to deliver on a service promise. Customer-centric airports establish meaningful customer relations and utilise those relations to identify customers’ top priorities and new services that will increase customer satisfaction and revenue.
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Customers’ top priorities are those essential aspects of the airport’s facilities and operations that drive customer satisfaction. These items are areas that customers have identified as important and where performance can be improved. Each airport will have certain priorities that are unique to their environment, but it is commonly the case that certain universal priorities show up consistently for many airports in customer satisfaction surveys.

Post 9-11, safety and security at the airport still continues to appear on most customers’ top priority lists. Cleanliness of terminal, courtesy of airport staff, accurate baggage handling, the quality and variety of concessions, and security screening and check-in processes are also common drivers of customer satisfaction at airports across the globe. But whether they would drive customer satisfaction, increase revenues and deliver loyalty depends on how well the airport performs in key service areas of importance to the customer.

In conclusion, improving customer satisfaction requires an understanding of the impact of customer expectations and the perceptions and realities of their airport service experience. Airports that are customer-centric generate delighted customers, positive word of mouth recommendations, increased employee motivation, a desirable airport image, and a positive impact on the bottom-line.