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RFID Makes Check-in Faster for Air France Passengers

France's Nice Côte d'Azur Airport is testing the use of Near Field Communication (NFC) RFID technology to eliminate the need for plastic customer-loyalty cards, and to speed up and simplify such processes as passenger identification, security checks and the awarding of airport loyalty points.

The airport is conducting the pilot in conjunction with IT service provider Amadeus, Air France and IER, which specializes in boarding-control hardware and software. Approximately 50 passengers who frequently fly on the Air France Nice-Paris Orly route are participating in the test, using NFC-enabled mobile phones as their electronic boarding and loyalty cards. A few participants employ NFC-enabled Nokia 6212 phones loaned to them by the airport, while others were given a sticker with an NFC-compliant RFID tag to attach to their cell phones.



Pass & Fly kiosk

In addition, Air New Zealand also automated boarding processes with RFID in November 2008, with help from EIR (see Air New Zealand Readies for RFID-enabled Boarding Passes).

Agnes Henry Scalliet, Nice Côte d'Azur Airport's regional marketing manager for customer relationship management, says the two systems are different, however. "The Air New Zealand system does not use NFC phones, nor does it store the boarding pass in the phone," she notes, adding that the New Zealand system is for a particular airline, whereas Pass & Fly was designed as an airport program with the ability to support multiple airlines.

The Pass & Fly pilot, which commenced in April 2009, will last until the end of October. At that point, the partners will discuss the possibility of commercializing the system they have created.

Last year, Nice Côte d'Azur Airport wanted to find a way to enable members of its customer-loyalty program to collect points more easily when they use the airport. The loyalty program, Henry Scalliet says, is designed to help the airport build a relationship with travelers and better understand their needs. At present, she notes, travelers not participating in the pilot must take their airport loyalty cards—smart cards with biometric identification capabilities—to an electronic kiosk to have points credited to their accounts. Passengers participating in the pilot, therefore, have one fewer cards to carry, and need not check in at the kiosk to be credited their loyalty points.

Other benefits of the Pass & Fly system include access to a fast lane for security checks. All of the details typically printed on a boarding card are stored electronically to an application running on the phone and accessible through that phone's sticker or built-in NFC module, which can be interrogated just like an RFID tag.

Pass & Fly Process

To use the NFC-based system, a traveler checks in with any of Air France's standard check-in modes, such as via an Internet-

connected computer or a cell phone, at a check-in counter or by way of a self-service kiosk located at the airport. He then goes to a Pass & Fly RFID interrogator at the airport, where pre-registered phones are identified and the system downloads boarding passes to the phones.



Nice Côte
d'Azur
Airport's
Agnes
Henry
Scalliet

At the security check, the traveler presents his phone to an RFID reader to identify himself and upload his boarding pass onto a computer operated by security personnel. The electronic boarding pass then appears on a computer screen for easy viewing by the security team. At the boarding gate, the passenger presents his phone to another Pass & Fly kiosk, which prints out a boarding card containing his seat assignment.

Henry Scalliet estimates that the system saves travelers 15 to 20 minutes per journey. Another benefit, according to the system's designers, when compared with an alternative option that would use a mobile phone's screen to display boarding-pass data in 2-D bar-code form, is that NFC-enabled mobile phones can be utilized for identification even when they are switched off or batteries are drained.

Amadeus developed the software for the mobile phones, as well as a departure-control system and airport interrogators that display important passenger information. IER built NFC-enabled

kiosks and RFID readers that have been connected to Air France's passenger-management system. The airline contributed electronic boarding-pass information to the project.

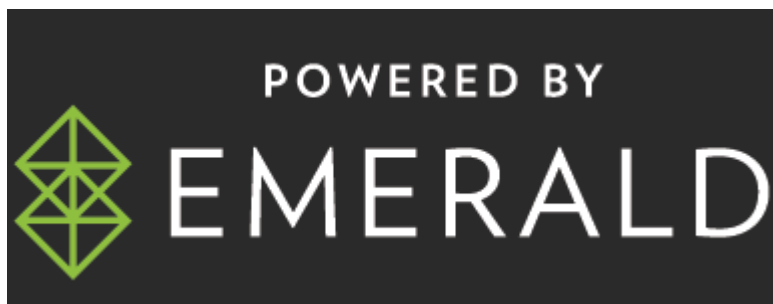
According to Henry Scalliet, the airport is considering expanding the system so that travelers can utilize the phones, for instance, to gain access to VIP lounges. Later, she adds, if NFC-based interrogators were installed on planes or on gateways, the system could provide travelers with a printed receipt verifying they actually boarded their plane.



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