

Self-service kiosks simplify the airport experience

By Joe Myxter, travel editor, Reporting from Future Travel Experience 2011 in Vancouver, B.C.

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Welcome to the airport. Now, go stand in line at the ticket counter to get your boarding pass. Once you're through security, you'll want to stop and check the departure board to make sure your flight is on schedule. Then, go find a map of the concourse so you can navigate your way to the gate, hunt for a café where you can score a decent cup of coffee, and try to find free Wi-Fi so you can double check the weather at your destination.

Or you can use a kiosk that can help you with all of those tasks.

IBM Multichannel Self Service Solutions' kiosk allows air travelers to check in, determine wait times for security and customs, check the time and weather forecasts, get a layout of the airport – including detailed directions – and find nearby restrooms, restaurants, lounges and coffee shops.

Smartphone users can scan a barcode and get the airport's layout and directions on their mobile device.

And while it has not yet taken off in the U.S. – primarily due to TSA regulations – the kiosk is capable of printing out baggage tags for self-tagging.

IBM is displaying its latest kiosk at the Future Travel Experience 2011, but the company already operates nearly 6,000 airline kiosks and about 2,000 airport kiosks around the world. Many of the kiosks are capable of offering the aforementioned services.

IBM is also showcasing a “Q card” reader that Qantas Airways has unveiled as part of its next-generation check-in program.



Not only can travelers access concourse maps on self-service kiosks, but they can scan a two-dimensional barcode and get the map in the palm of their hands.

The carrier's system has found success among domestic flights in Australia. Qantas frequent fliers swipe their chip-embedded cards. The readers use near-field communication (NFC) technology, and the system takes as little as five seconds to check-in travelers without bags, and about 55 seconds for travelers with bags, according to Gabriella D'Alessandro, head of IT for Qantas Airways Operations.

Qantas launched its “faster, smarter check-in” initiative in June 2011. No other airlines have yet followed the airline's lead.

But Simon Rucker, solution manager for IBM Global Business Services, anticipates travelers will continue to embrace high-tech options that make trips through the airport more efficient. “Adoption has been tremendous.”

Joe Myxter has been running msnbc.com's Travel section since 2006. [Follow him on Twitter.](#)