

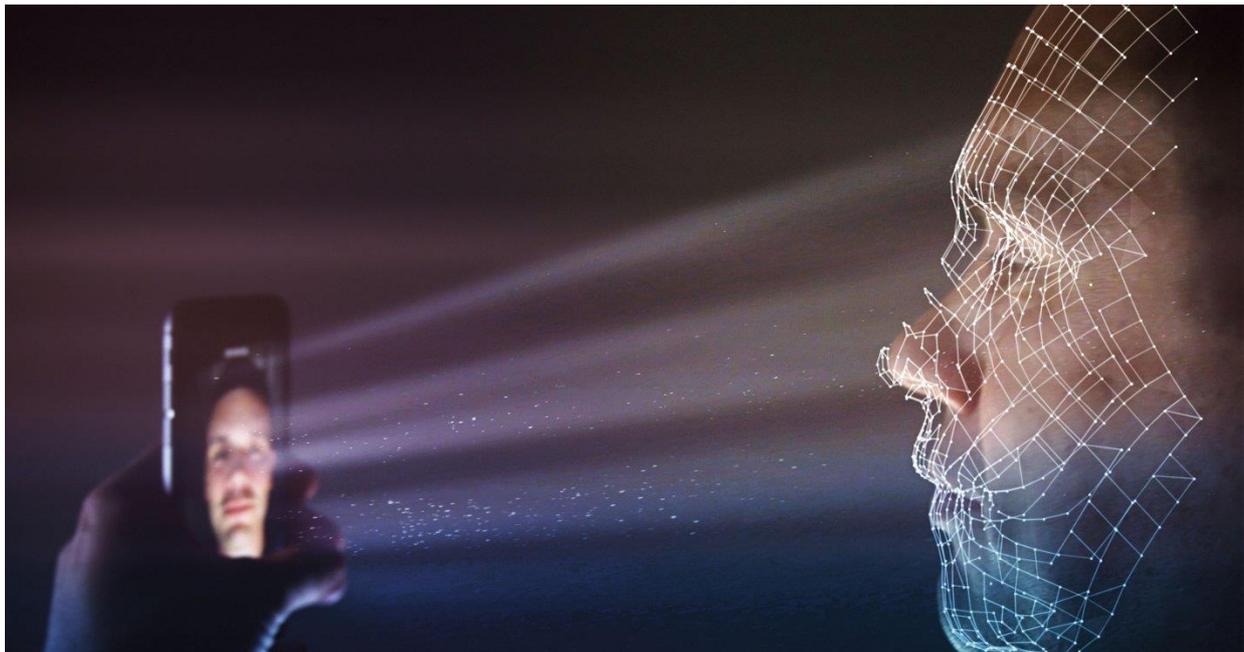
Emerging IT tools enable evolution, not revolution

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Disruptive technology poses challenges for airlines and airports. *Marisa Garcia reports*

The term 'disruptive technology' is often used in the aviation industry to refer to innovations that suddenly create a new market and displace established companies, but the extent to which this applies in the aviation industry is debatable.

Disruption may be the wrong description for change in an aviation context, according to Ilya Gutlin, SITA president Air Travel Solutions. "If you look at operational processes at airports for airlines, airports, and government entities, that industry has never truly been disrupted," he said. "It's been an evolutionary change. Every airline has moved to kiosks, and now to biometrics and frictionless travel through the airport which is still at the point of concept [POC] stage," he said.



Biometrics could unlock a number of applications for an enhanced passenger experience – if all the stakeholders at an airport are active participants. (Getty Images)

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Implementation can be a slow process when applied to global aviation infrastructure, but Gutlin described steady progress to *Jane's*. "Our first [self-service] bag drop was seven years ago in Brisbane for JetStar and only now do you have a major push from airports in implementing bag drop. We've had a lot of success this year as well around bag drop and we're working on implementing it in Düsseldorf," he said.

“All of this took a long evolution – a lot of POCs at airlines and airports – because they have to go through a process change and they want a partner who is going to hold their hand through it. That’s why we’re also investing in having a post implementation and really making sure that process change is painless for the passengers, for the airlines, and for the airports. The only way that you can do that is evolutionary. You can’t really do it revolutionary.”

From a passenger perspective, Gloria Guevara Manzo, president and CEO of the World Travel & Tourism Council, foresees many exciting opportunities for applied technology that would make travelling easier and more liberating. Examples for passenger processing (check-in and boarding) include the use of facial recognition linked to biometrics. “Your face will be your identity,” she said. “It’s something that cannot be easily cloned or copied and the most secure way to identify the person that is travelling.”

The challenge is how to enlist all airport stakeholders so that the full potential of biometrics in the terminal can be realised. “I believe that by working together we can come up with a standard so that we can then engage with governments,” Guevara Manzo added. “Airlines can be very efficient, and airports can be very efficient, but let’s be honest – that’s not enough. We need immigration, we need customs, we need everyone in the entire travel chain to use biometrics and be more efficient.”

Airport IT solution providers agree that broader adoption of biometric identity will be the next big change for the aviation industry, but must be deployed first within national jurisdictions. “When you start talking about moving between governments, that’s where the challenge is,” said Anthony Chapman, senior director, Global Product Management and Strategic Programs, Global Airports at Rockwell Collins IMS. “We have a prototype proof-of-concept that uses a government-issued electronic identity. So once you’ve enrolled, you can use that identity across multiple flights. It’s really difficult when governments will start to accept that on transborder crossings But that’s the role of IATA [International Air Transport Association] to get that intergovernment trust.”

VR and 3D printing

Guevara Manzo also believes that emerging consumer and industrial technologies will find their place in air transport industry. “Virtual reality [VR] has been around for years in aviation – in the training for airline pilots in simulators. But it was very expensive. However, we will see an increase in promoting destinations and travel experiences in VR over the next few years because the technology is being democratised and it is more affordable. Also, this technology is easy to code and provides a good taste of the travel experience, including how the airport looks, the stores, the destinations, even peeking inside aircraft.”

[Continued in full version...]

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