

# Air travel: 2020s style

Digital technology will turn flying into a hyper-personalized, connected experience. What can air travelers of the future expect?



**Personalization and big data will combine with Augmented Reality in airports.** Passengers will be shown individual signage directing them to their particular gate, cutting down on the confusing clutter of wayfinding boards at some airports. Facial recognition will be used to serve targeted advertising to individuals as they walk past billboards “in five to ten years”, says Gomez. Before then, flights could be targeted using aggregated information, says Janeczko. “If you have one flight arriving from Hong Kong with hundreds of business travelers and a second flight coming in with a lot of vacationers, you could send them different advertisements.”

**Carriers are already using big data to help them understand demand and improve customer service, right from the point of planning a trip. The digital age is a “fabulous opportunity” for airlines, says Marine Gall, Head of Innovation, Transformation Direction at Air France: “Today we are working on bots and artificial intelligence, Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality to evolve the experience of our customers and offer a more emotional experience.”**

In the future, chat bots that understand natural language will advise passengers

on the cheapest, quickest or best value routes to a particular destination, and give recommendations about potential activities at the destination, says **Jordan Janeczko**, a member of the Scientific Community from Atos’ Centers of Excellence.

They will also help passengers with questions about complex travel plans, such as the maximum baggage size or weight across all flights. Because many frequent travelers are disappointed with the recent perceived decrease in quality, advanced analytics will also enable carriers to avoid competing solely on

price and to identify specific sub-groups to target for new high-margin services. “With analytics identifying personalized services which customer will pay more for, instead of a race to the bottom, there can be a race to the niche,” says Janeczko. This could be extra luggage for families, the latest VR experiences for tourists, or super-fast connectivity for business travelers. And with so much available data, an airline plus its partners could also offer personalized services in the city being visited, such as special activities and offers.

**Machine learning will help minimize the impact of disruption** by automating processes for unexpected flight cancellations like rebooking passengers onto new flights, or finding them hotel rooms, says Janeczko. “This will not only decrease penalty payments through faster rerouting, but also better manage unhappy customers,” he adds. Much of the baggage handling process is already automated, but improvements in robotics will allow for the quicker retrieval of bags from planes when they land.

“We are working with Paris airport and the authorities to accelerate border control,” adds Gomez. “One of the things we’ll be issuing as soon as possible is face recognition for passport control.” In Dubai, a British start-up called ObjectTech is exploring ‘biometric tunnels’ that scan people’s faces as they walk through and compare them to a digital database of passports, to speed up the process. Blockchain will improve safety by providing an indisputable record of who is on board, and could help manage disruption by making it possible for delayed passengers to book a hotel room with just their boarding pass.



**We’re moving into an era of hyper-personalization,** says Gomez. Air France-KLM are equipping staff at all stages of the journey with iPads so they can access the latest information about individual customers in real time. “When you arrive at the plane, the cabin crew could know if you’ve had a late connection and decide, for example, to serve you champagne,” she says. That degree of customization will come to in-flight entertainments systems as well, once connectivity for planes in the air improves in 2020 and beyond. In future, Virtual Reality headsets could replace the seat-back screen. “There aren’t a lot of industries where you have your clients ‘stuck in a room’ for some hours, giving our airlines the opportunity to show how much we care about our passengers,” says Gomez.



**Self-service check-in kiosks will become more human,** according to **Isabel Gomez Garcia De Soria**, IT Director, Operations Research Air France-KLM. “The interfaces will improve to have natural language voice processing to understand the intentions of the clients,” she says. Kiosks could even analyze the passenger’s emotional state and adjust their responses accordingly. Holographic technology might mean you don’t even need to drag your bags to a kiosk: “We would like the kiosk to move and go and find our passenger.”

## Qatar’s connected airport

Hamad International Airport in Doha is beginning its transformation into a fully digital airport. “Our aim is to offer passengers supreme control over their time and journey from the moment they enter the airport to the moment they are seated on the aircraft - in essence, without any human interaction,” says COO Badr Al Meer. Biometrics will provide seamless identity management across all key passenger touch-points, enabling a passenger’s face to become, effectively, their passport as they move through check-in, security and border control.

