Easy-peasy self-service bag tagging

About 14 million easyJet passengers flying in and out of Gatwick Airport choose to use the self-service bag-drop system. Considering that the airline introduced it just two and a half years ago, the uptake has been swift. Thomas Doogan, ground-operations customer experience manager at easyJet, speaks about the shift in passenger behaviour and the role **eezeetags** is playing in the airline's innovation.

eezeetags' snap tags allow travellers to easily tag their own bags at self-service facilities, allowing staff to direct their attention where it is needed.

No matter how you spell it, easiness is a fundamental value upon which easyJet and eezeetags have built their companies. It is this shared philosophy that has resulted in a thriving partnership, with eezeetags supplying the airline with simple and reliable bag tags to be used at self-service bag-drop facilities, which have grown exponentially in use.

"We went from 37 check-in desks in the North Terminal at Gatwick to 28 automated kiosks," says easyJet ground-operations customer experience manager Thomas Doogan. "That was our initial roll-out; we've now extended that to 48 kiosks. We have massively changed the customer proposition."

With additional facilities in the South Terminal, too, easyJet has already been operating its self-service bag drops for two and a half years. During this time, 19% of its 73 million annual customers have chosen this option over the traditional bag-drop experience. The airline, ever committed to maximising

client convenience, intends to raise that to 45% by the end of 2017, and to 70% by the end of 2018.

There have been major benefits, not least in efficiency, says Doogan. "The perception of our friendliness by customers has increased by 10% and that is in the top two boxes – people who are 'very satisfied' and 'extremely satisfied'."

The customers' praise is attributable to the ground crew's new-found freedom. Previously, the crew had to dedicate time and energy to tagging baggage in addition to interacting with customers. Now, its sole focus is greeting self-service passengers and being on hand to assist those in need of help to navigate the new system, which doesn't happen often, as it is simple to use. Passengers can print the tags for their baggage separately or at the same time as they print their boarding passes.

User-focused
It is with the end-users' ease in mind that eezeetags' tags were created. The instructions on how to use them are very simple, eschewing 'how-to-use' text for a clear arrangement of two dots and a small drawing. It's an intuitive process that makes tagging up to 300% faster compared with a standard bag tag.

Another perk of the eezeetags tag that it is the only baggage tag that does not require the user to pull away liner paper to expose the adhesive. This is what eezeetags founder Borry Vrieling calls the "magic" of his product, as the adhesive sticks only to itself. It is nearly impossible to bungle the tag's application – even for nervous flyers or a lone parent juggling an infant in one hand and a bag tag in the other. And, as there is no liner to pull away, they are cleaner to use and leave a lighter ecological footprint in their wake.

Before implementing eezeetags, Doogan recalls, the airport had "lots of discarded ends of tags on the floor and the place did not look great". But placing rubbish bins at the kiosks made the area look cluttered and some passengers still dropped liners to the floor. "The solution for a nice clean experience wasn't realised until we started to use the snap tags or eezeetags."

Fundamental function
There are essentially two types of bag tag. There are snap tags – like eezeetags – and peelable tags, which require

As airports seek to streamline passenger flow, self-service facilities offer smoother, stress-free operations for travellers.

training on how to effectively use. These were comparatively complex and, therefore, left to the airline staff to apply.

"We cannot expect passengers using a modern bag-drop system to apply a bag tag that was designed 40 years ago and meant to be applied by a trained agent," stresses Vrieling. And to train passengers on how to use them at self-service kiosks would have been too demanding an undertaking.

"At Gatwick," Doogan says, "many customers only fly once a year. We have a lot more people flying more regularly but, in terms of re-educating customers, it would take a long time to do. The better option was to find something easy to use, and the snap tag was a great solution."

While the fundamental function of the eezeetag is to tag bags, it can be customised for other purposes, too, such as being used as a label for approved cabin luggage or as a tag to indicate passengers that are cleared to bypass security during airport transfers.

Beyond simplicity of use is the real motivating factor of self-service stations: speed. "At the very peak of summer and Christmas," Doogan says, "queues used to last up to an hour. Since the introduction of the auto bag drop, the maximum queue time is 11 minutes and 95% of our customers queue for under six minutes. It is very significant."

Solutions for every customer
Passenger feedback has been thorough and favourable. easyJet has devoted much attention to its flagship site of Gatwick to ensure that roll-out is smooth. Beyond its customer feedback portal, it has also engaged with passengers on site as they experience the self-service facilities.

"We went deep into getting feedback," Doogan says, "by looking at the different customer types – such as those needing special assistance, wheelchair users, businesspeople who regularly travel, holiday homeowners, parents with infants and families with children – we segmented them and asked specifically about the journey experience.

"By really understanding each customer, we found the best solution for everyone and, therefore, the best overall solution for all travellers."

While easyJet can lay claim to the title of kick-starter of this self-service revolution, the airline is even more pleased with the speed with which it is being mimicked by others. "This is great," Doogan says, "because we are not building this for us; we are building it for the aviation world."

This means the airline has ensured that the model fits all in the industry, not just point-to-point, low-cost carriers like itself. "When we're looking at our own innovation," Doogan says, "we are thinking about it in a broader sense. We're not just thinking about us; we're thinking about what we can put together to change the face of aviation and make it easier for customers all over the world."

Seeking this universally simple solution for the industry is also what drove the creation of eezeetags, and this motivation is already paying off. With a significant market share in European airports, eezeetags has also entered the US and Asia-Pacific.

Customers' shift towards self-reliant consumption in most areas of life has, inevitably, infiltrated the airport industry. Booking and checking in online or at a kiosk, plus e-gates, self-boarding and self-service bag-drop points, are all part of a bigger theme, according to Vrieling, "to create a positive end-to-end passenger experience, solve space and capacity constraints, and reduce operational cost".

Fortunately, amid the constant progress in this brave new world, there are companies such as easyJet and eezeetags making it is easier to navigate, with as little stress as possible. ∎

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