China's Top Airports Focus on IT

A recent SITA report projects that self-service airports will be commonplace in China by the year 2016.

China's elite airports expect their total IT spending to grow by 23% from 2012 to 2013, more than double the 11% rate of revenue growth rate for the same period. These investments are expected to rise even more this year, as 80% of China's airports are projected to increase their IT budgets in preparation for the more than 870 million passengers expected by 2016.

These projections were gleaned from the SITA ACI Airline Business Airport IT Trends Survey's 10th edition which includes data from the top 25 airports in China.

According to the study, China is in the early stages of adopting the self-serve terminals, with only 8% of the airports using self-service booths as their main check-in system. However, by the year 2016, the mainstream method will be self-serve and 54% of China's airports will utilize self-serve check-in booths for most passengers. Over 70% of these airports intend to use self-service stations for other services including luggage tag printing as well as luggage drop.

Social media and mobile applications will also be used to aid in airport customer service and are expected to become an integral part of the self-serve stations.

May Zhou of SITA China claims that the biggest trial for airports in China is to keep up with the large increase in passenger traffic. An increase of over 200 million passengers per year is expected by 2016, and technology is seen as a way to streamline and improve the experience these passengers will have. This accelerated growth of air travel is a challenge, and information technology is expected to play an important role in handling this increase and also offering travelers a smooth and trouble-free experience.

The SITA survey reveals how important social media will be to China's airports. By the year 2016, over 87% of China's top airports will provide flight information via social media. 42% of airports in China have

already begun using social media to report airport status, with only 29% of other airports using these methods.

Mobile technology will also play a major role in the future of airports, and nearly 4/5 of Chinese airports expect it to be the main form of customer service communication by 2016. Flight status and airport information as well as customer service are all expected to be accessed via mobile apps.

Even though stakeholders are often reluctant to share data, almost 48% of airports in China are currently investing in business intelligence solutions which can be used to turn data into useful information that can be acted upon.

IT spending is projected to increase to 5.85% this year in China's airports, which is higher than the 5.43% of revenues for all global airports. In 2012, China spent 5.25% of revenues on IT for its airports, whereas global airports spent 4.9% of revenues.

Not only are Chinese airports investing in IT, but they are also adding new terminals and remodeling and extending their airports to prepare for the expected growth in passengers. IATA projects that China will see traffic grow to 873 million passengers by the year 2016 which will be a 29% growth from its 679 million travelers in 2012.

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