

Chapter 2

New Marketing Strategy: Mobile Applications as a Marketing Tool in Airports

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ABSTRACT

Mobile applications (apps) on smartphones are being increasingly used to access news, entertainment, weather forecast, etc. As apps gain a stronger footing in the 21st century, large airports are taking advantage of this new marketing outlet by developing apps for branding and (business) communication purposes. In recent years, due to its multi-functionality, which provides added value to the service content offered, this marketing model has established itself as a communication tool. This research aims are twofold: First, to evaluate how an airport app is having a direct and positive influence on passengers' sense of security-control; second, to analyse how this tool can improve passengers' satisfaction and their perceived image of an airport. To analyse the influence an app has on passengers-users at airports, 103 passengers-users were surveyed. The results are particularly relevant for passengers as they are more efficient during their leisure time in terminals, and their stress levels decrease.

INTRODUCTION

Airports are adopting mobile marketing with the aim of improving both the experience and satisfaction of passengers within these infrastructures. We should note, however, that translating these theories into practice is not an easy task, especially at airports where they have micro- settings with very different and well-defined activities. As airports only provide the facilities needed to bring together passengers and companies under the same roof, seeking to adjust airport capacity to demand along with attempting to maintain an acceptable margin of profit and user satisfaction, is a very difficult mission (Doganis, 1992).

Nevertheless, large airports are moving toward a more business-like model in which management is more commercially driven, and are focused on introducing an environment with more creative and tech-

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New Marketing Strategy

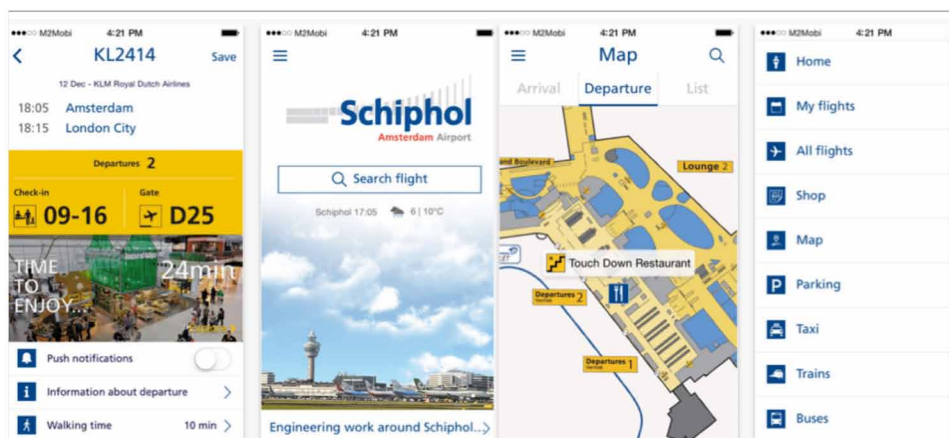
nological features or amenities. Consequently, airports are losing the image of just being an intermodal node in transportation where passengers are just another element in the chain process. While applying a commercial perspective to airport management supposedly means that these infrastructures can improve their financing capabilities, it is important to highlight that according to SITA (2012), “improving customer service is the top driver for new technology investment in airports”. Therefore, the objectives of this research are twofold: First, to analyse how airport apps are having a direct and positive influence on passengers’ sense of security-control. Second, to study how this tool can improve passengers’ satisfaction and their perceived image of an airport. People are increasingly using their mobile devices to multitask and carry on multiple conversations in organizations (Stephens, 2012).

Mobile applications, most commonly referred to as “apps”, are just another mobile marketing platform. As apps have become of the utmost importance in the service sector, they cannot be considered a mere communication tool. As stated by Nueno and Scholz (1998) state, “if long- term success is desired, the benefits must go beyond a purely cosmetic nature.”

Thus, mobile marketing should not just be a fashionable tool or something that companies adopt to keep up with competitors. No one doubts today that the Internet is an important medium, and the rise of the smartphone and the tablet only predicts a great future for mobile marketing. As mobile devices are on people’s hands at all times, they have become an essential, personal, and intimate tool for all users. As mentioned previously, this marketing platform promotes products and services in a world where people are not just dedicating more time to the mobile internet but are also heavily relying on it to organize their lives (e.g., make restaurant reservations or doctor’s appointments). Today, mobile marketing is not just accepted, but it is also expected. To say that buying and selling habits are rapidly changing due to the powerful association between mobile devices and marketing is not an overstatement. Therefore, airports, such as Schiphol in Amsterdam, saw in mobile marketing both the opportunity to increase passengers’ overall satisfaction and to exalt the image passengers had of the airport. Following the creation of the Schiphol Amsterdam Airport mobile app, the passenger experience at the airport was improved at all levels. In addition, according to the World (2013), this airport was rated the best in Europe and the third best in the world for that year.

Figure 1. Schiphol Amsterdam Airport (Awarded 5 times as the best Airport App)

Source: itunes.apple.com



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