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CUSS

the pinnacle of check-in

Common-use check-in technology has been around a decade or more, with ARINC's MUSE and SITA's CUTE systems leading the way. In terms of current technology, however, there is no question that the pinnacle of check-in is Common-Use Self-Service kiosks – known as CUSS. Las Vegas is famously the biggest early-adopter of the CUSS concept and now boasts almost 200 kiosks, but the idea works just as well – if not even better – for small airports. Research by Nicole Nelson, written by John Frank-Keyes

Las Vegas McCarran was the first airport to implement multi-airline, common-use self-service in the U.S. It started out as the world's largest kiosk site and it has remained there. According to ARINC's John Dungan: "Not only do they have more kiosks there, they have more airlines sharing the device. In Las Vegas, there are 15 airlines represented on the one kiosk. But we have a real good trend of small airports adopting CUSS. There is White Plains, of course, and we just picked up Pittsburgh."

White Plains

Gary Hennessey is US Airways Customer Service Manager at White Plains and Chairperson of the airport's MUSE consortium. MUSE is ARINC's common-use system which features workstations at the counter and at the gate. "This whole movement started in Europe where they have single ground handlers handling all of the airlines at one airport – that is the

philosophical base of this program. In the airport where one or a small number of companies are handling a large number of companies, that is a major benefit, because on an hour-by-hour basis over the course of the day, you can reallocate your physical assets and therefore make your operation run more efficiently.

White Plains also employs CUSS kiosks – although only four at present. Indeed, it is believed to be the smallest U.S. airport to do so, but Hennessey admitted Allentown might be of comparable size.

Flexibility of function

"In this particular place, there is an unexpected side benefit to iMUSE. The physical facility, the actual terminal itself, is far too small for the amount of business that we have. "Consequently, iMUSE gives us a certain flexibility enabling us to solve some of the scope problems. For example, there are only four gates and 90 flights that leave from those gates operated by 10 airlines. Obviously, if you had proprietary equipment, that simply wouldn't work."

Hennessey argued that the two main benefits of a common-use system are the flexibility afforded if you only have one handler or several handlers handling a number of different systems. "Alternatively, in a space-limited airport like this one, it allows you the flexibility of using the system where you need to use it.

"We're in our third iteration. The only problem we had with our last iteration is one we created ourselves. There is so much business here that at the end of the lease our equipment was wearing out. But if we had proprietary equipment, we would have had the same problem."

Pittsburgh's plans

Over at PIT, the airport is planning to implement both iMUSE, common-use equipment that the airline employees use, and CUSS kiosks, or self-serve, that the passengers use. Mike Adams, Engineering Department Project Manager for Allegheny County Airport Authority, expects to bring in eight self-service kiosks by end-June, with common-use ticket counters and common-use gates later. The June date is significant because this would mean the equipment would be in place before the baseball All-Star game at Pittsburgh's PNC Park in July.

"We're hoping that it is there for people who just have carry-on luggage. You can't check your luggage through these self-service kiosks – you still have to go to the ticket counter – but we still expect a lot of people would come in with carry-on. So



White Plains is believed to be the smallest U.S. airport using CUSS, currently employing four kiosks.

these would alleviate some of the rush at the ticket counters. It's still unofficial until we execute a contract, but that is our goal... end of June."

ARINC's Dungan said: "The PIT implementation is roughly twice the size of White Plains, with 50 workstations and eight kiosks. White Plains has 16 workstations and four kiosks."

Adams said the airport intends to budget for further expansion in future years. "We have some other things that are going to happen after these kiosks. There is a gate management system in an interlock with the gates that is included, but as far as common use, that would probably be a 2007 project before we did more of the ticket counters."

What does he regard as the key benefits of such systems? "It would streamline the process for passengers with carry-on luggage to go straight to these kiosks and not stand in line with other passengers needing services and checking bags, so it should improve the flow of passengers."

Right-sizing CUSS?

Adams further clarified: "We don't have an over-abundance of airlines and problems at our ticket counters. We have some extra capacity there, which is why we decided not to go with the rest of the ticket counters and the gates. We do have rushes of people on Monday mornings, at the beginning or end of the week and during peak periods where CUSS would help with that.

"What is occurring in PIT is that our origination traffic has increased a great deal. That is why they see these as a customer service incentive and benefit to the customer. There is more O&D in Pittsburgh, so we're just helping get them through the check-in process."

Size matters

We'll give Dungan the final word: "CUSS is a real benefit to the passengers, especially in the smaller markets that normally wouldn't see a kiosk and passengers would just have to get in line. It is almost better for the smaller places, because in places like Las Vegas or the larger airports, the airlines are going to bring their own equipment in. That's not as likely in a smaller location. In fact, I would say that there are probably airlines that did not put kiosks in White Plains because they simply could not justify the costs, but now they can easily put self-service into White Plains because the equipment is already there. All they have to do is provide the application." ■