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QANTAS



The Q card allows Qantas's frequent flyers to check-in within five seconds

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When a new technology emerges, airlines must assess whether the benefits of early adoption will outweigh the risks and challenges, as costly errors can be made through hasty implementation.

An inventive change by Qantas to passenger experience using radio-frequency identification (RFID) has shown that it is a carrier capable of swiftly envisaging how best to use the latest technologies to enhance working processes.

While the use of RFID technology in airports is nothing new, Qantas's innovative Q Bag Tag and faster, smarter check-in have developed its scope beyond any previous use.

Initial RFID baggage tracking solutions had relied on single-use disposable tags and only focused on improving baggage sorting after check-in. Qantas's system also addresses the front end of the process with the aim of simplifying a passenger's complete journey through an airport while improving the efficiency and accuracy of baggage sortation.

"The technology [RFID] has been around for a while, it just depends how airlines choose to use it," says Tanya Bulkin, head of customer experience design for Qantas.

As one of the drivers behind Qantas's modernised check-in system, she says that the airline had been looking to "deliver a speed and ease proposition in our domestic [Australian] terminals, reducing congestion pain points for customers", and that RFID is one of the technologies that had enabled this.

Planned for implementation at every major Qantas domestic airport this year, Qantas's modernised check-in includes synchronising passengers' luggage with their flight details by means of the Q Bag Tag, which can be used at any port across Qantas's domestic network.

Using technology from Tagsys, a provider of RFID infrastructure, the tag contains a permanent RFID chip which stores details of up to four flights and is able to be reprogrammed for future flights.

Available free to Qantas's platinum, gold and silver frequent flyers, the Q Bag Tag can be purchased by any passenger and allows them to check in luggage in an automated bag drop. The service allows passengers to not only weigh and hand over bags, but also pay any excess fees through the machines.



"Q Bag Tags have reduced the time customers spend dropping off their bag"

TANYA BULKIN

Head of customer experience, Qantas

This innovative application of RFID was recognised by the judging panel, who noted: "RFID has been around a long time, but not much has happened. It [the Q Bag Tag and faster, smarter check-in] shows real creativity."

Bulkin describes the Q Bag Tag system as one of a number of changes to Qantas's modernised check-in process designed to streamline the passenger's journey and remove stress. Q cards containing RFID chips allow frequent flyers and Qantas club members who have not checked in online or via phone to do so by swiping readers at the airport. Passengers who check in via the reader, online or by phone can bypass the check-in entirely and head straight for the auto bag drop.

Speaking about the effect that Q Bag Tags and the modernised check-in have had, Bulkin says they have "absolutely reduced the congestion we have in our halls and the amount of time a customer needs to spend dropping off their bag".

Qantas hopes that its development of RFID will encourage similar global adoption of the technology.

The judging panel was equally optimistic in agreeing that Qantas's system was "potentially a game-changer and could change the business in a number of aspects".

ALEX THOMAS