

'Virtually' Transforming the Common Use Paradigm

Common use passenger processing and shared use airport facilities have long been great concepts. Unfortunately, they have lacked meaningful execution and true airline acceptance for the first twenty-five years of their existence. Today's virtualization technology changes the game and allows airports the ability to deliver true native system functionality to airlines while garnering unparalleled facility control and growth capabilities.

The genesis of the airport common use standard was the 1984 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles. The airport needed to accommodate airline operations that exceeded the capacity of the airport's facilities and also provide the ability for non-tenant airlines to operate temporarily from the airport. An operational system had to be implemented that would allow multiple airlines to share facilities like ticket counters and arrival/departure gates.

To accommodate these requirements, the airport implemented the first CUTE (Common

Use Terminal Equipment) System. This system allowed multiple airlines to connect to their host systems. Unfortunately, this "connection" was accomplished via a generic interface that had to be configured to accommodate every airline, and airlines had to modify their passenger processing software to comply with the

“technology changes the game and allows airports the ability to deliver...”

system. This homogenization, while necessary, severely limited the airlines ability to utilize the process-driven functionality that their native systems contained.

Widespread acceptance of CUTE technology by airlines in the United States has been hindered by the degradation of operational efficiency. Yet the implementation of common use systems at international airports has grown steadily

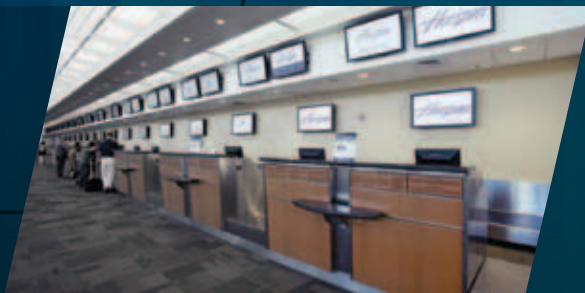
over the years, as airlines seek to cross-utilize airport facilities that are too limited to allow any type of exclusive use. Importantly, despite most airlines' lack of unbridled support for common use, international routes are far too valuable to make service decisions based on the ability to utilize proprietary facilities and equipment.

As the domestic airline industry and its business processes are evolving, U.S. airports are now looking at common use and shared use facilities more keenly, and with good reason. Financially troubled airlines are looking for any way to reduce costs and

improve operational efficiency. Likewise, airports have seen their service levels reduced drastically in recent years and are researching every option to encourage new route growth from their facilities.

In many ways, common use technology can help both airlines and airports recognize these goals. Airlines can save significantly by utilizing airport provided systems, especially when the

Common Use facilities at Fresno-Yosemite International



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support costs of these systems are borne by the airport. Airports can assert more management control of their facilities, while simultaneously becoming more attractive for new airline service.

As interest grows among airports to include common use technology in new and existing facilities, the question remains of how to overcome the inherent lack of airline support for these systems. The answer is virtualization. Virtualization is technology that allows a systems provider the ability to deliver any airlines’ own proprietary passenger processing systems without any limitation or the need to modify their software. The airport simply provides common network, hardware and support and the airlines are up and operating using their own software.

If virtualization is the silver bullet of common use, why wasn’t it used before? In short, the technology didn’t exist. In the last few years, virtualization has become widely accepted and is used in large business systems and servers, as well as on home comput-

ers. It is not complex. In fact, virtualization is simple, extraordinarily secure and reliable when combined with secure virtual network technology. The true value to the airport is the ability to deliver what the airlines have always wanted from common use: lower costs, higher efficiency and their own software. Virtualization accomplishes these goals and at a cost far lower than any legacy common use system.

Virtualization eliminates the need to create one operating standard and force airlines to comply

with their systems. Shared use technology driven by virtualization is here today and operating successfully at airports around the world, and it can ease the airlines’ reluctance to adopt shared use technology.

As airlines continue to be tepid about service expansions, airports can answer the call by mitigating risk and providing the necessary infrastructure to allow airlines the flexibility to expand service without capital investment. There is no need to wait for another standard.

The environment is right to deploy the systems and technology that will allow airlines to use their own systems and control costs, while allowing airports to grow organically. The answer is to transform common use, virtually. ✈

“Shared use technology driven by virtualization is here today...”

Instead, airlines can use their own software with full business functionality without the need to invest additional capital to modify and certify



Photos courtesy Brandon Carmody