



PERSONALIZING THE TRAVELER JOURNEY

Data And Tech Usage
Continue To Evolve In Airports

BY SARAH BELING



Left: Lise D'Andrea, president and CEO of CXE, says airports are increasingly using real-time data and analytics as well as AI-driven chatbots to track passenger preferences, tailor customer product recommendations and solicit feedback to continually improve their concessions, retail and general experience offerings.

What if walking through an airport felt like embarking on a travel agency-planned vacation? What if every stop along the journey to boarding was customized and curated for *your* needs? What if airports didn't make you feel like just another slightly-harried cog in a fast-moving machine?

While there are some aspects of the airport experience that can't be too heavily personalized – going through the TSA security checkpoints, for instance – airports, concessionaires and transportation technology startups are discovering that there *are* ways to make travelers feel valued, and willing to spend their money accordingly.

One key to customizing passenger experience? “Leveraging data and technology to understand customer preferences and behaviors,” says Lise D'Andrea, president and CEO of customer experience consulting firm **CXE**. D'Andrea notes that airports can use real-time data and analytics as well as AI-driven chatbots to track passenger preferences, tailor customer product recommendations and solicit feedback to continually improve their concessions, retail and general experience offerings.

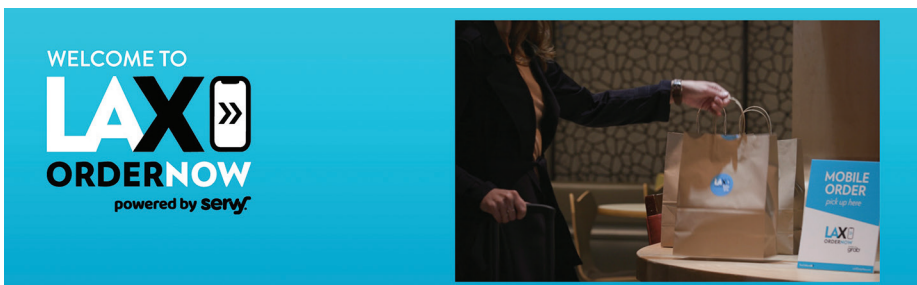
D'Andrea cites **Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport (DFW)** as having implemented successful traveler customization programs through its mobile app that delivers real-time, personalized offers to travelers based on their location within the airport and past preferences. And customized programming like that at **Miami International Airport (MIA)**, “which leverages biometric technology to enhance security and boarding processes while also offering tailored services to frequent flyers, such as expedited access to lounges or personalized dining recommendations,” she says, “demonstrate how North American airports are adopting technology to enhance the customer experience through personalization.”

D'Andrea has also seen successful passenger experience personalization

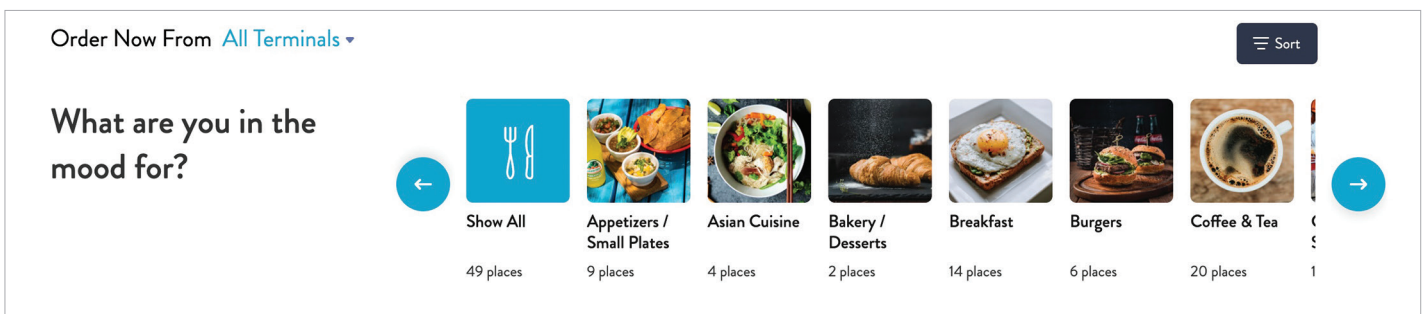
through the **Port Authority of New York and New Jersey (PANYNJ)**, which offers virtual assistance technology at their customer service desks, and **Philadelphia International Airport (PHL)**, which uses mobile food delivery apps.

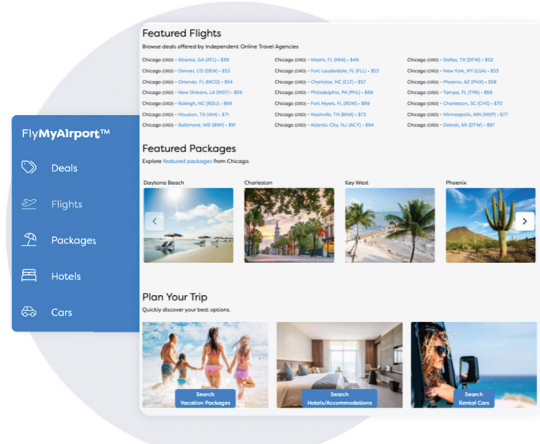
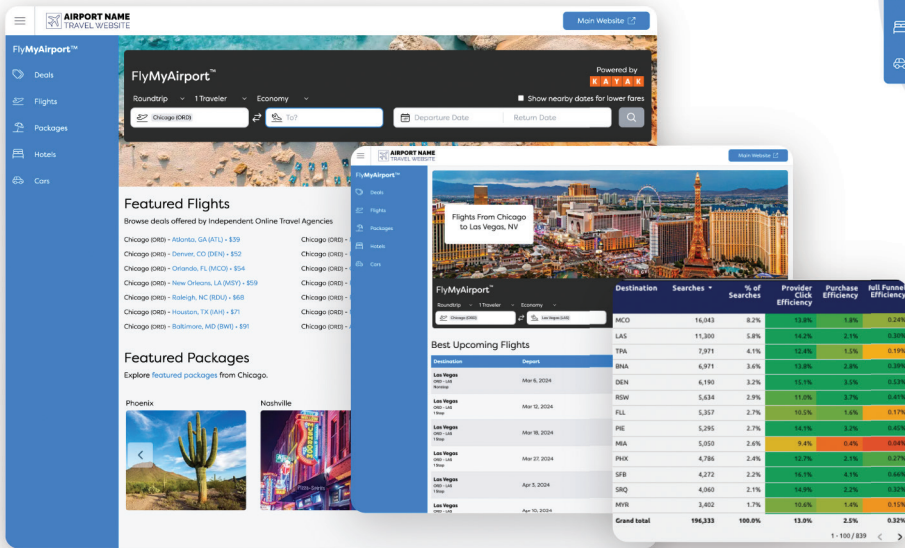
Food Delivery Options

One mobile food ordering application making waves is the Grab Airport Marketplace, an in-airport e-commerce platform powered by self-service hospitality company **Servy** that's currently installed at more than 80 airports and 1,000 airport restaurants. The Grab Airport Marketplace aggregates concessions content across **Los Angeles International Airport (LAX)** into a unified order and payment platform,



Left, Below: The Grab Airport Marketplace aggregates concessions content across LAX into a unified order and payment platform, allowing passengers to seamlessly access and order food from multiple locations.





Pre-Airport Connections

But before customers make their way to a gate or lounge to order food, they need to book their flight. And if airports want travelers to enjoy a custom experience, they must find a way to convince passengers to choose their airport over other regional options. Enter FlyMyAirport, the flight search platform from technology firm **Airport One, LLC** that allows airports to add a native flight search function into their own website.

Through FlyMyAirport, passengers can review available flights to the selected destination before being seamlessly transitioned to booking platform KAYAK, where they can compare options and book directly with the airline. “Airports are often the underdog in the fiercely competitive travel industry,” explains Keegan Coulter, COO of Airport One, LLC. “Airlines and online travel agents have vast marketing budgets, while airports are caught in the middle, balancing the demands of airlines and their communities. We saw that airports lacked a good place to send potential travelers.”

By giving airports a platform where their own facility is always the default destination, FlyMyAirport “[helps] airports tell their best story to consumers,” adds Coulter. “Additionally, FlyMyAirport provides valuable data and analytics, giving airports real-time insights into consumer demand and air service quality. This allows for smarter marketing decisions and more informed discussions with airlines about improving connectivity,” he adds.

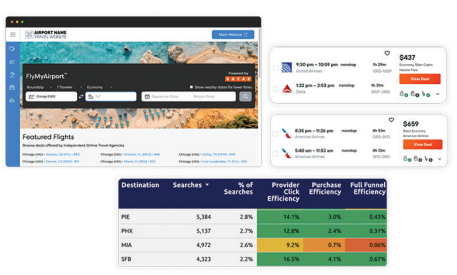
And when it comes to personalization, FlyMyAirport’s data analytics even allow for airports to develop features based on customized passenger segments. “Our

allowing passengers to seamlessly access and order food from restaurants and retailers. The app – which also has the ability to function within the Priority Pass app as well as with in-terminal QR codes – also has the ability to deliver personalized experiences for travelers and airport employees, as is the case at LAX, where Servy has partnered with developer **Unibail-Rodamco-Westfield Airports (URW)** and global airport experience specialists, **Airport Dimensions** to provide even more granular customization options.

After launching within LAX Order Now in October 2023, the consortium “have continued to tweak the program as we collect more data, learn consumer habits and drivers to transact, and have evolved the campaigns based on these findings,” says Livney.

“It’s still early days for airport commercial CRM and we’re just getting started,” he adds, but “feedback from passengers and employees remains positive as they find value being incentivized for their loyalty, and we hear concessionaires appreciate the drive more volume digitally through these programs which creates a more efficient operation and higher average tickets.”

Above: FlyMyAirport provides data and analytics, giving airports real-time insights into consumer demand. The platform also allows airports to develop features based on customized passenger segments.



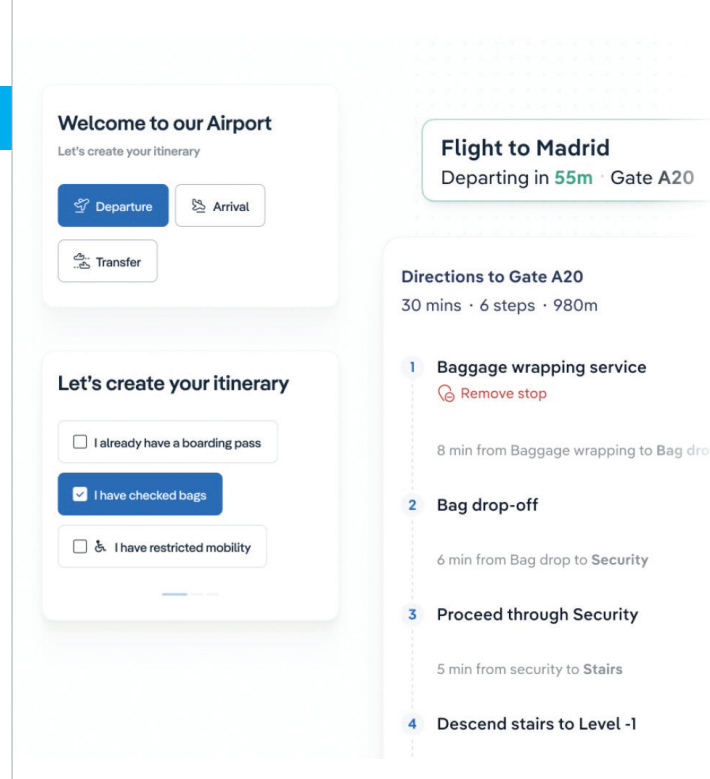
system assigns an anonymous IDs to consumers and then tracks their behavior and records events like searches and purchases. This allows us to create personas (e.g. like-audiences) based on segmentation, and run more personalized campaigns as well as retarget consumers based on their actual behavior and activity,” says Coulter.

The platform, which launched in July 2023, has quickly picked up steam. “Consumers have told us that they love FlyMyAirport and we have ideas in our product roadmap to further delight them with improved personalization and accompanying UX design,” says Coulter. “As far as airports go, they have become our biggest fans and even sales force.”

He notes that FlyMyAirport is expected to hit 50 airports by the end of next year. Ultimately, “FlyMyAirport streamlines the travel planning process, giving travelers a clear view of all their options while keeping them engaged with the airport’s brand,” he adds.

The possibilities for personalizing passenger journeys don’t end there. Travel tech companies like Berlin-based **Airsiders** offer passengers the ability to preview, map out, receive real-time alerts and save their end-to-end journey in Apple Wallet through the company’s browser-based AirportCompass platform. When designing the AirportCompass platform, which is currently available for customers to access at Rome’s **Leonardo da Vinci Rome Fiumicino Airport (FCO)**, “We very much look at [the passenger’s] pain points and needs – what stresses a passenger,” says Airsiders business development manager Leo Ferri. “Integrating data is something we’ve done early on, because for us, it’s all about personalized routing starting with the flight,” he adds. “We have to be able to understand, at a very minimum, what flight is that passenger on” to further customize travel recommendations.

“Is the passenger cohort more business? Is it more leisure? Is it more of a ‘depending on the airport?’” he says. “Without asking for much information from the passenger, by looking at the flight they’ve booked, [airports] can make a lot of deductions – [assessing whether] it makes more sense to promote a cappuccino, or the fresh-squeezed orange juice deal, or beers and olives, or a lounge.”



Left: Airsiders’ Airport Compass platform offers passengers the ability to preview, map out, receive real-time alerts and save their end-to-end journey

Revenue Impacts

When airports successfully implement personalization technology, they can maximize non-aeronautical revenue, says CXE’s D’Andrea.

“Personalization leads to a more seamless and enjoyable travel experience, and offering the right service or product at the right time can reduce stress and improve satisfaction,” says D’Andrea. “Targeted promotions and personalized retail suggestions can drive higher sales for both retail and concessions. Knowing a passenger’s preferences allows for more effective upselling and cross-selling.”

Personalized experiences can also “strengthen loyalty by making passengers feel valued,” she adds. “A frequent flyer is more likely to return to an airline or use specific airport services when their needs are consistently met.”

Personalization, “especially when powered by AI and machine learning, allows for a more efficient allocation of resources,” D’Andrea continues, “whether it’s optimizing security checkpoints, boarding gates, or concession offers based on passenger flow and needs.”

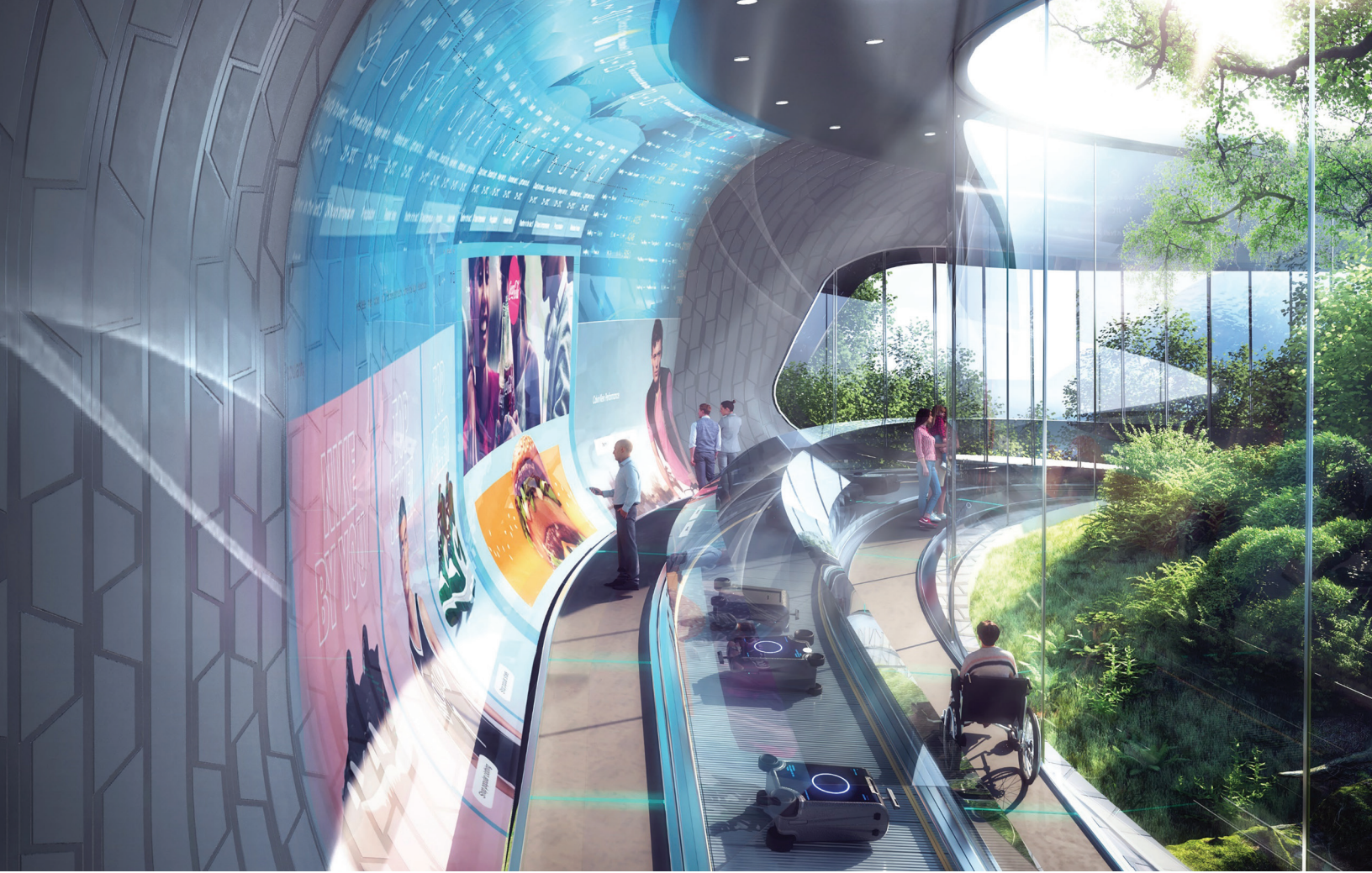
But airports must also be careful to wield their data analytics wisely. The pitfalls “include privacy concerns, as hyper-personalization requires collecting and using vast amounts of personal data, which can lead to customer discomfort if not handled transparently and securely,” she says, noting that “additionally, over-personalization may come across as intrusive if not done tactfully.”

For Servy and the Grab Airport Marketplace app, “The challenges concessions face today broadly are the same through digital ordering – labor constraints, high turnover, and peaky volumes – and digital experiences the same challenges,” says Livney. “When guests order online, they are expecting their order when it’s promised. When you order at home for delivery, you’re stationary and a delay periodically can be accepted. When you order on the go at an airport and have a flight to catch, delays with your order can be quite challenging,” he adds.

“Peaks from flight banks and general operation challenges, layered on top by labor challenges in many markets, makes it a difficult market for any concessionaire to operate flawlessly,” adds Livney. “We have invested significantly into technologies which help concessions manage their expected turnaround time and communicate those up-front to the guest to provide the necessary transparency for guests to feel in control of their experience, however challenges do pop up where orders are delayed that we constantly work on improving with our concessions partners,” he says, adding that they’ve also increased their training programs to make sure that new staff are well-equipped to handle hiccups.

Future Gains

In the future, the industry’s reliance on and usage of data is expected to expand exponentially.



“I think we’ve only scratched the surface of personalization and creating the ultimate curated experience for the guest,” says Livney. “Across the industry, we all collect a significant amount of data but there is very limited sharing of that today. We must work to break down those silos and start to understand the guest to really personalize the experience.”

“Within Servy, we are focused on that journey and working to understand the guests and their behaviors across all of our products to truly create a tailored offering,” Livney continues. “We have a roadmap to deliver this while maintaining data privacy and ownership across our various stakeholders. Each operator can start to understand loyalty within its units, but it takes a broader platform like the airport itself and technology partners like Servy to break down the silos and start to understand behaviors and drive engagement holistically.”

FlyMyAirport is also looking ahead at ways to continue personalization.

“We have plans to introduce more personalization, including enabling settings that make sure that the information we

provide consumers are most relevant to them,” says Coulter, such as “price alerts for favorite destinations, for example, or a custom layout that includes more information on destinations of higher interest.”

And when it comes to the next chapter of customer experience, some aviation-focused architects are looking for ways to customize the design of future airports to meet personalization needs.

Architecture and engineering firm **HDR**, for example, has imagined one concept that could include a completely personalized check-in process where the marriage of biometrics and passenger data allows travelers to be picked up from their homes by an airline-provided autonomous vehicle, immediately hand off their baggage to be processed, order a beverage to be waiting for them upon arrival, be transported through security to their gates via a moving sidewalk and encounter customized retail options along the way.

“Much of the personalization depends on the incorporation of biometrics and passengers’ willingness to opt into using that technology,” says Kevin Ashton, aviation architecture principal for HDR.

Above: Architecture and engineering firm HDR has imagined a completely personalized check-in process through the marriage of biometrics and passenger data.

“That can provide the ability to process passengers through security more efficiently, even send messages to their mobile devices if they’re in proximity to a retailer or food or beverage experience that may match their profit.”

The future “will likely see deeper integration of AI and IoT (Internet of Things) in airports, allowing for hyper-personalized experiences across multiple touchpoints,” says D’Andrea. “From pre-arrival mobile notifications offering exclusive deals to smart kiosks and in-store digital assistants recommending products, airports will become hubs of tailored experiences. Biometrics and AI will continue to streamline processes, reducing friction points like security, boarding, and shopping. However, the focus will need to balance convenience with transparency to ensure customers feel their data is used ethically and securely.” ■