

Airline Trends

Skipping the queue

Raymond Kollau reports on the changes in consumer behaviour and the ways airlines can meet this on-demand



Our on-demand economy has generated a sense of entitlement to fast, simple, and efficient experiences as it taps into consumer appetite for greater convenience, speed, and simplicity.

For example, analysis from quick-arrival taxi business Uber shows the longer Uber has been in a city, the less willing to wait for a car everyone becomes.

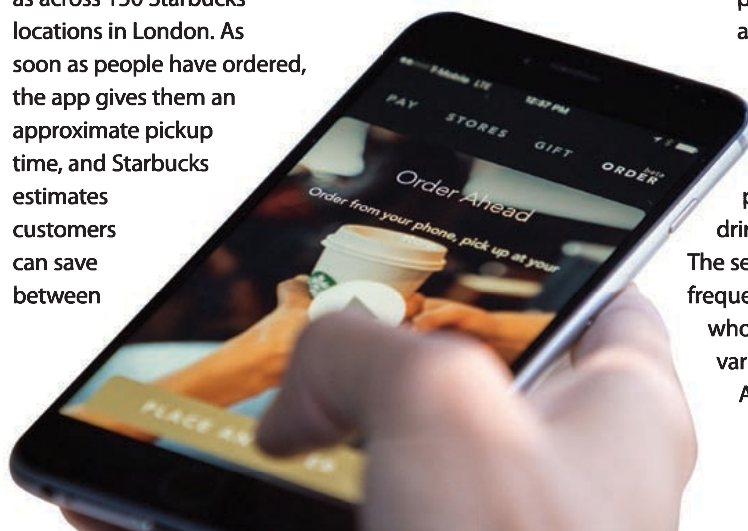
In the F&B industry, ordering and paying via tablet devices has become the new norm at casual dining chains such as Applebees and Chili's across the US, while airport restaurateur OTG has installed thousands of food ordering iPads at half a dozen US airports.

And a growing number of airlines – including Virgin America, Air New Zealand, Norwegian, Azul and Finnair – allow passengers to order meals, snacks and drinks via the IFE system in between regular meal services, while passengers onboard TUI Netherlands can order drinks and duty free via their own smartphone

Convenience is everything

Saving consumers even more time, Starbucks has rolled out an order-ahead mobile application across all of its 7,000 stores in the US, as well as across 150 Starbucks locations in London. As soon as people have ordered, the app gives them an approximate pickup time, and Starbucks estimates customers can save between

"Pre-ordering F&B has evolved from being rather dull to being a smart move that is about convenience and getting the things the way you want"



10 and 15 minutes using this option. A similar service is being tested by McDonalds and Wendy's. At multiple airports in the US, passengers can pre-order meals from airport restaurants using mobile apps such as Grab, AirGrub and HMS Hosts' B4 You Board.

Passengers using these pre-order apps select a restaurant, place an order, pay and schedule a pick up time. When they arrive at the restaurant in the departure hall the freshly made meal is waiting to be collected. Orders can be placed days in advance, or even when passengers are queuing at security.

Catering choice

Previously reserved for passengers who ordered a special meal for cultural, religious or dietary reasons, a growing number of full-service airlines let passenger pre-order their meals and drinks before their flight. The service is popular with frequent travellers and those who are looking for a more varied choice.

As Chris Chamberlin from

PROFILE



Raymond Kollau

Raymond is founder of industry and consumer trends research agency airlinetrends.com and a frequent presenter of trend sessions for airlines.

Australian Business Traveller says: "It's a win-win for both travellers and [airlines]. Passengers can lock-in their preferred meal choice in advance, rather than take a chance on missing out on their first choice. On the other side of the coin, [airlines] can reduce wastage and ultimately its costs by serving every passenger the meal they prefer and limiting the extra servings on board."

Singapore Airlines' *Book The Cook* allows passengers in First, Business and Premium Economy to choose their favourite dish from an extensive menu, while those passengers travelling in Business and First can select from sixty menus on outbound routes from Singapore.

Whereas many airlines only allow passengers to pre-order from the airline's home port – in order to control logistics and quality – Singapore's *Book The Cook* is also available on many flights departing from outstations – be it that a more limited choice is offered.

Qantas' *Select on Q-Eat* pre-order service is also available in Economy on international flights departing Australia. Passengers can pre-order their choice of meal – including a fourth "online exclusive option" – between seven days and 12 hours prior to departure online or using the Qantas app.

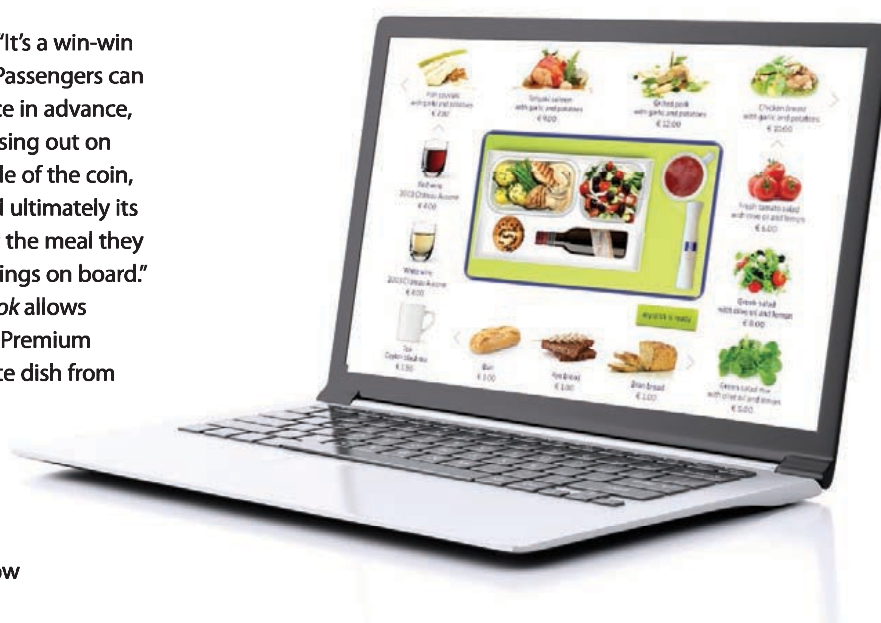
Pre-ordering paid meals

According to inflight catering expert Nikos Loukas: "Pre-orders are definitely on the increase, but more so with the 'free' pre-order programmes of First, Business and Premium Economy. Paid pre-order still seems to be an issue, and for example Aer Lingus recently cut back the number of its pre-order dishes from around five to one which goes to show, perhaps, Economy passengers aren't ready to part with their money for paid airline meals."

This means airlines will have to become more inventive in order to increase paid pre-order take rates.

Mobile-based ordering

Taking a cue from smartphone-based ordering deployed by the likes of Starbucks, McDonalds,



"Passengers can virtually 'drag and drop' their preferred menu items onto a digital airline tray"

Grab and AirGrub, passengers on Alaska Airlines can reserve their favourite meals on the airline's smartphone app

up to 12 hours before their flight and pay when the flight attendant delivers the meal onboard.

Austrian Airlines is one of a dozen full-service airlines that offers Economy passengers on long-haul flights the option to upgrade to a premium meal for a fee of 10 to 20 euro. They can also pre-order a meal in a later stage via Austrian's mobile app. At Vienna Airport passengers can pre-order meals at the last-minute at the 'DO & CO A La Carte' desk until one hour prior to scheduled departure. Passengers who have ordered a paid gourmet meal are served before the regular food service starts in the Economy cabin.

Customise your meal

In an effort to provide passengers who pre-book their meal with even more choice, airBaltic has gained worldwide attention for its customised food ordering system. Passengers can virtually 'drag and drop' their preferred meal items onto a digital airline tray and create one of more than 70 pre-order meal combinations. According to airBaltics' vp corporate communications: "the airBalticMeal service has seen a positive uptake because it gives passengers the option to personalise their meal". •

Facing page: The Grab app is proving popular for hurried travellers at airports; the pre-order option from Starbucks, (this page) airBaltic's digital airline tray offering the 'drag and drop' option for preferred meals