

gategroup on mastering critical last mile of aircraft catering

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Chris Kinsella, Regional Chief Commercial Officer North America, gategroup

While final journey from the catering kitchen to the aircraft is often invisible to passengers, this last mile is critical to an airline's overall service delivery.

Every meal, beverage, service item and piece of onboard equipment must arrive at the correct aircraft, in the correct quantity and specification within a very narrow operating window. [gategroup's](#) Chris Kinsella, Regional Chief Commercial Officer North America, gategroup, tells *PAX International* that success in the final stage directly impacts an airline's on-time performance, operational reliability and ability to consistently deliver the onboard experience promised to passengers.

"At gategroup, we know reliability comes down to consistent execution and getting the details right

every day. The last mile is where it all comes together, ensuring we deliver safely, on time and to the standards our airlines customers and their passengers expect,” he says.



The final mile of aircraft catering requires coordination, safety and precision to keep airline operations running smoothly

Polished under pressure

Aircraft catering operates in a dynamic airport environment where schedules and requirements can change rapidly. Some of the greatest operational challenges arise particularly during aircraft swaps, gate changes, weather disruptions, irregular operations, last-minute changes to passenger or meal counts and short turnarounds.

Drivers also work in busy ramp environments, often maneuvering in tight spaces and in close proximity to aircraft, ground support equipment and other employees. These conditions make safety a critical consideration at every stage of the operation.

For gategroup, health and safety are core priorities, supported by standardized operating procedures, disciplined processes, robust food safety controls, ongoing employee training and continued investment in operational excellence. The goal is to ensure that safety and reliability are closely aligned, even when operations are under pressure and tight deadlines.

That commitment was reflected last fall when gategroup opened its upgraded gategourmet facility at Montréal-Trudeau International Airport (YUL), featuring a new fleet of catering trucks equipped with 360-degree camera systems and anti-collision technology.

Kinsella says the additional visibility from the cameras paired with the anti-collision systems gives its drivers another layer of awareness by helping reduce risk when positioning and maneuvering around an aircraft.

“Technology does not replace good training or disciplined operating procedures, but it can give our employees better tools to do their jobs safely and consistently,” he shares.



Experienced teams and disciplined processes transform the final mile of aircraft catering into a safe, efficient operation

Communication, coordination and flexibility

Kinsella says success during disruption comes down to a few key factors.

“The priority is to remain flexible and responsive without compromising food safety, product quality or service. That requires strong communication, clear accountability and close coordination with our airline and airport partners, particularly when timelines are compressed,” he says.

gategroup’s scale and experience across its global operational network are particularly valuable in these situations. With more than 300 locations across 68 countries, its teams manage complex and changing operating environments every day, building the experience and knowledge needed to respond quickly when plans change.

The tech-enabled future

In aircraft catering, a few minutes can make a big difference. Kinsella says he sees significant opportunities for technology and new operating practices to improve safety, visibility and precision, particularly by giving teams better insight into flight schedules, gate changes, aircraft movements, production status and fleet positioning. The goal is to help teams anticipate issues rather than react to them.

“But I do not think the answer is technology alone,” he shares. “The biggest gains will come from combining the right technology with experienced people, simpler processes and consistent operating standards. Ultimately, technology should make the operation easier to manage and give our teams

better tools to deliver safely, accurately and on time.”

Looking ahead, gategroup sees reliability and operational resilience becoming increasingly important across North America, alongside continued demand for premium onboard experiences, sustainable solutions and technology-enabled operations. Sustainability will also remain embedded in everyday decision-making, from facility modernization and fleet investment to responsible sourcing and waste reduction.

As a strategically important region for gategroup, Kinsella says the focus will remain on delivering operational excellence and strengthening customer partnerships.

“We will continue to invest in our people, facilities, safety, technology, premium catering and service quality. We are committed to deepening customer partnerships, supporting our airline customers as they grow and delivering the reliability and quality they expect from us.”