
Jeremy's World: User friendly/Friendly user

By **Jeremy Clark** on July, 25 2019 | Jeremy's World



Frustrated with the technology found in airports and on airlines? You aren't alone.

I am in a bit of a conundrum. I'm often accused of being a bit of a fuddy-duddy when it comes to the employment of technology in our industry. I am sorry if I am prone to point out the failings of automated check-in counters (which I abhor) and other systems designed to allegedly facilitate ease but are clearly designed to save cost.

This is rather ironic given that I have spent a considerable amount of my career advising caterers and installing complex software to improve profitability and streamline work processes.

However, I do not claim to be a geek in that sense. I would not know a line of code from a flamingo. What I do know is how things work in the real world with real people and how to design processes that people can actually use.

I'm often left amazed and wondering if these systems' designers have ever tried using them themselves. For example, when checking in my kids to fly back to Europe, though the "No Mobile Phone" box was ticked the system still demanded a mobile number before continuing. Flying in from Finland and Denmark through Singapore to Malaysia, both had problems with automated systems that required human intervention in CPH, HEL and SIN.

So let's look at the impact of technology in catering and hospitality - and this is where I get really frothy. The whole premise of "service" and "hospitality" is to provide precisely that. If the machines and software that are designed to facilitate this end up degrading it, then why are they there at all? I'll tell you: money.

In an interview with an unnamed (now departed) COO of a company involved in onboard sales, the exec commented that they were "anticipating an increase in customer complaints" during the introduction of technology on an airline. In what world does that make sense? In the airline catering world of 2019, that's where.

I have made a note: on all but one of every flight offering a buy-on-board service that I have taken over the past 12 months, there were glitches with some part of the sales system, meaning products went unsold, were given away for free or passengers were left not serviced.

In the name of profit, airlines are prepared to pursue the technology, hoping that one of the following happens - and in time it will:

1. The technology will improve - no sign of this yet.
2. Passengers will get used to the inconvenience. Sadly, this is the most likely option.

In the years I spent implementing software in airline environments, my hardest task was not getting the users to use it, but getting the designers to understand the limitations of the users.

As I observe ever more user-unfriendly systems being foisted upon hapless passengers and frustrated crew, it seems nothing much has changed.