

Technology will help restore efficiency and confidence in aviation's baggage processes

By [Peter Drummond](#)

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You'll have seen the images spreading across the media; the "baggage mountains" accumulating at airports around the globe as passengers wait to be reunited with their delayed bags. The numbers reflect the industry's current difficulties in maintaining effective baggage management processes amid surging passenger traffic as we emerge from the pandemic.



Source: Brian Jackson via [123RF](#)

Baggage mishandling: What do the numbers say?

While mishandling still affects a relatively small proportion of all bags, Sita's [2022 Baggage IT Insights](#) report reveals that more bags were mishandled in 2021 than in 2020. As the industry's recovery began in 2021, the global rate of mishandled bags per thousand passengers reached 4.35, up 24% from 2020.

Our management system for mishandled baggage, WorldTracer, gave us an idea of how things are this year. The system recorded roughly three times more mishandled bag reports for January to March 2022 compared to the previous-year period. From April to June 2022, the system showed five times more mishandled bag reports than in the second quarter of 2021.

May 2022 saw a similar number of mishandled bag reports to May 2019, before the pandemic. The number of reports in June 2022 slightly surpassed the figure for June 2019, even though passenger traffic had not yet caught up with pre-pandemic levels. This means that the rate of mishandled bags per passenger could be significantly higher for May to June 2022 compared to the same period in 2019.

As the recovery of international passenger traffic [accelerates](#), the rate could go up further because, historically, transfers from one flight to another account for most mishandling. The 2022 Baggage IT Insights research found that globally, the likelihood of mishandling a bag is about 4.7 times higher on international routes than on domestic routes.

Technology is the answer

Much of the challenge is down to staff shortages at airlines, airports, and ground handlers. They downsized to survive the

pandemic, strongly impacting baggage management resources and expertise. In only a few months, they've had to switch from survival mode to almost full-scale operations due to the swift recovery of passenger traffic over the summer. Some concentrated spikes in traffic have even surpassed pre-pandemic levels. Fast recruitment to meet the demand has proven difficult amid a tight labor market.

How can industry stakeholders address this challenge, curb the baggage mishandling rate, and generate greater operational efficiencies?

They must do more with less. The answer lies in smart technologies that automate key processes, allowing airports and airlines to reallocate the staff they have where they are most needed. Automation and digitalisation will enable the industry to better utilise its staff's expertise, keep passengers happy, and make strides in saving cost and time. Technology also provides the agility to scale operations up and down based on demand, a much-needed capability these days.

A proactive approach to preventing mishandling

An example of such a technology is Sita Bag Manager. The baggage management and reconciliation system tracks bags in real-time across the airport environment, capturing every bag loaded onto a plane, unit load device (ULD), or cart. Beyond simple barcode reading, the solution scans and evaluates the characteristics of each bag against the flight parameters to ensure bags are loaded onto the right plane.

This proactive approach, for example, helps prevent bag mishandling before it happens. Most importantly, the solution tracks bags when they're most likely to go astray – during the transfer process. Customers who've implemented the baggage management process report a 20% reduction in the number of bags mishandled. Ground handling service provider dnata Singapore is among them. They integrated the solution with over 40 airline customers and Changi Airport's baggage systems.

With Bag Manager, airlines can provide passengers with more clarity on the location of their bags in real time, helping to alleviate concerns and reduce wait times at collection. The recently released 2022 Sita [\[\https://www.sita.aero/resources/surveys-reports/passenger-it-insights-2022/ Passenger IT Insights report found that passengers' levels of positive emotions about baggage collection increased by 9% from 2016 to Q1 2022. In the same period, the rate of passengers receiving baggage updates at collection via their mobile devices rose from none to 29%. Using technology and making real-time information accessible seems to have a significant positive impact on passenger satisfaction.

The solution can also be customised to help ensure swift aircraft turnaround and on-time performance, leading to time, cost, and energy savings. Offloading bags when a checked-in passenger fails to board the aircraft can cause flight delays. For this reason, Saudia implemented a 'never onto aircraft' notification direct to staff devices in the manager application. This lets staff quickly identify whether a bag belongs to a boarded passenger, reducing on-stand time delays by up to 20 minutes.

Empowering passengers while boosting efficiency

To meet the urgent current demands, there are technologies available for faster implementation to help manage passenger inquiries efficiently while freeing up valuable agent resources. The Tracer Self Service, for example, gives power and autonomy back to passengers. They can file a missing bag report from their mobile device, avoiding long queues at baggage service counters or offices. Passengers can then track their bag from when it is recovered to when it is handed over to a courier and delivered to their door.

When we trialled this service with Lufthansa, it proved popular: two-thirds of passengers opted to use the mobile-enabled solution instead of visiting a baggage counter. Not only is the solution convenient for passengers, but it can save airlines on average \$10 for every mishandled bag reported by helping reduce the infrastructure needed to manage the reporting of delayed bags.

The blow the pandemic has dealt to the industry is apparent now more than ever. But it's exciting to see demand for travel rebound after the prolonged period of disruption. Airlines, airports, and ground handlers can effectively navigate the recovery by embracing digitalization and smart technologies. We at Sita, a trusted partner to the industry, are confident they will succeed, and we're here to help.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Peter Drummond, Head of Baggage, SITA.

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