READY OR NOT...

IATA Resolution 753 on baggage tracking is intended to encourage airlines to reduce mishandling by implementing cross-industry tracking for every baggage journey. It comes into effect on 1 June 2018; is the industry prepared?

Resolution 753 (R753) stipulates four key tracking points in the baggage journey:

- Passenger handover to the airline
- Loading to the aircraft
- Delivery to the transfer area
- Return to the passenger

While the resolution may seem simple, it poses several questions.

David Kennedy, president and CEO of Quantum Aviation Solutions, outlines: "At the highest level, we have to ask what is compliant. Each airline has to interpret and implement R753 in its own way. Currently bags may not be scanned at some points. Now, airlines will have to scan all bags at certain touch points."

But will an airline be considered compliant purely on the basis of its home hub being certified under R753, for instance?

A second issue is infrastructure, which may require substantial investment. Barcode scanning provides a more cost-effective solution than RFID tracking, while XML or MQSeries allows direct messaging between stakeholders (at no cost, once set up) so that tracking data can be shared as necessary.

The cost of tracking technology has fallen substantially in the last decade or two. Historically, a WiFi network would have been required – a costly piece of infrastructure to install. Now cellular networks are often used, especially in less developed countries; Quantum has developed this "lighter" sort of baggage tracking solution at some smaller stations, Kennedy confirms.

Cliff Burchfield, responsible for business development at Brock Solutions, further explains that while WiFi solutions are well suited to high volumes of traffic, cellular networks are a

Cliff Burchfield of Brock Solutions

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more cost-effective option where bag volumes (and consequently, data volumes) are low.

"Cellular data and cloud computing have now reached a level of sophistication and maturity where we can use them in our industry to create mobile, dynamic scanning applications for tracking and scanning that we didn't have five years ago," he observes.

Just the visibility alone that tracking allows can reduce lost/mishandled baggage incidents (and costs) significantly.

Plus: "Through a mobile passenger-facing recovery process, we can get immediate feedback about what the passenger wants to do with their bag. This can shorten repatriation of the bag by a day or two, resulting in a smaller claim," Burchfield explains.

Kennedy goes on to ask: "What are the implications if tracking is not compliant with R753? It is directed at airlines; airports technically don't have to do anything. Some carriers are saying the fines for not complying are still less than the cost of being compliant. This is contentious, and runs counter to the spirit of the agreement – which is to do this as an industry," he points out.

So far uptake of the initiative is somewhat hit and miss. Some carriers that are trying to prepare may not be ready in time, and others are not on board at all. Still others, though, are insisting on implementation of baggage tracking systems in advance of the June deadline, Burchfield says.
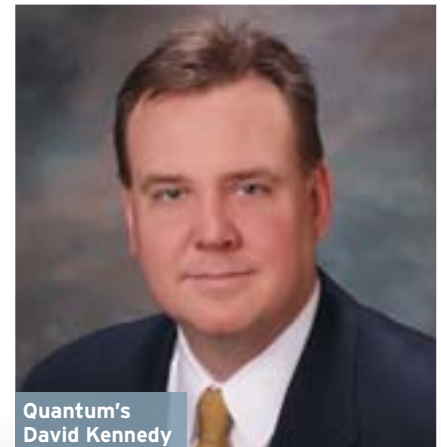
Quantum's David Kennedy

Kennedy notes a trend towards passenger expectation for good tracking across the industry. "Most big IATA carriers are trying to improve their baggage performance with or without R753 anyway," he says. "Outside of R753 some carriers have invested heavily, so they're set up already."

Burchfield points out that "some ground handling agreements are quite long, and no one wants to renegotiate their contracts, so there's stalemate in some cases. Part of this problem is that handlers already feel under a lot of pressure to do everything for nothing," he remarks. AGS