By

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Some airline apps can truly help make travel a breeze, and others are a bit more turbulent. So what differentiates a great app from a mediocre one? Here are my five tips for success.

1. Support both planning and traveling

The application needs to support both booked passengers and users who are just browsing. Given that the former are probably in a hurry, there needs to be a very clear call to action to see their boarding pass or check in. On the Alaska Airline app the home screen is dedicated to the passenger's next flight, with the gate, departure time, and QR code to scan at security and boarding. The American Airlines app, on the other hand, uses the home screen to display a pretty picture, a link to search for flights, and two links to either sign up for rewards or log in—- I'm just about to go through security, just show me my gate and boarding pass!

2. Develop a small set of use cases and focus on those

Travelers have little time to navigate through a long and complicated information architecture, so keep the application focused around the core use cases for users browsing for flights and those who are about to take off. The AA app has a long menu that includes everything from searching for flights to playing Sudoku. This approach ignores user context, giving them features they are unlikely to want and certainly don't need.

3. Take advantage of unique platform features

Both Delta and Alaska Air allow users to add their boarding pass to the iOS Passbook so it's easy to access it without unlocking the phone. The British Airlines app on Windows Phone allows users to pin the boarding pass to the home screen as a live tile so the user knows exactly where to find it, and can see updated flight information without having to open the app.

4. Don't require log in

Less frequent travelers probably won't remember their username and password so allow them to use the application without logging in. Make it easy to look up a reservation.

5. Be ready for the future

Wearables and iBeacons will present new opportunities to improve the travel experience. Virgin Airlines, for instance, is reportedly [working on an app that uses iBeacons](#) to automatically open the electronic boarding pass as the traveler approaches security. And Google's video to introduce Android Wear shows a woman running towards check-in and using her smart-watch for the boarding pass.

Airline apps need to work for people who are in a hurry, have their hands full, and really want to get to their destination. Great applications make the airport experience more efficient, giving them more time to relax and enjoy the journey.

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