Interview with David ARFI, Self-Boarding Project Manager, Air France.

Could you give us Air France's feedback on the Self-Boarding system?
It all began back in 2015, when a pilot version was installed at Roissy-Charles de Gaulle airport. The first gates were then started up in April 2016. To date, 65% of the roll-out has been implemented at CDG. Mid-October, we'll start work on the first gates at Orly and Montpellier.
The same thing was done with Kaba gates in Nice last June.
Toulouse has also installed boarding gates.

What were your objectives in setting up the Self-Boarding system?
 1- **Workforce optimization**
 2- **Better on-time performance during the boarding process**
 3- **Improved customer relations**

What was the project's starting point?
Firstly, we carried out customer surveys. The customers themselves asked for customer relations to be improved. We created benchmarks in Europe and the USA to work out how to make the most of the Self-Boarding system. Then we launched the project at Roissy - Charles de Gaulle.

What have you gained with the Self-Boarding system?
Undeniably, and most importantly for Air France, **we have improved our customer relations**.
Following the Self-Boarding system pilot tests, we carried out a quality survey (in April 2015) in which 94% of the customers questioned reported being satisfied with this new service.
For medium-haul flights, user surveys are carried out via "smiley" terminals and we obtain 80% satisfaction.
These surveys revealed that previously, agents had their "heads in their screens" and did not look at the customers.
With the Self-Boarding system, agents welcome and inform customers looking at them directly, and this changes the customer's perception and experience. To achieve this result, we worked with an ergonomic assessment specialist to help position the agents correctly in their environment. The gates are just one tool among many others.
The process must be as simple as possible so that the agents can get used to using this new method of operation. We worked using a briefing system and each agent trained his colleagues in this new way of working.
We have improved our on-time performance by 10 points on long-haul flights. This is a huge improvement and we are really delighted with it.
Workforce optimization now has to take regulatory constraints related to states of emergency into account, and therefore needs to be moderated. Our difficulty is related to renewed states of emergency without long-term solutions.
The biometric system is a solution designed to alleviate this difficulty, however it is complicated to implement, and, due to the protection of personal data guaranteed by the French data protection authority (CNIL), this is a very long and arduous task. Records are difficult to collect and validate. However, we intend to call upon service providers employing additional agents to perform the document checks.
Despite these difficulties, the Self-Boarding system results in **substantial operational gains**.

Have you come up against any obstacles in the project?
One of the most common errors is to say that "if we get things moving faster in the boarding area, the gangways will become congested". However, I don't agree with this. In fact, if the process is thorough, careful pacing avoids congestion. A regular flow of passengers through the boarding area prevents bottlenecks in the gangways. Pre-boarding passengers creates bottlenecks which do not subside. Pre-boarding is not a good idea. It's best not to rush; "to go faster, we need to take our time".

After several months' use, have you noticed any technical issues?
The agents have fed back certain problems related:
- to the gates and equipment
- to the settings
- to the middle ware
- occasionally to the software

This feedback is given naturally and constructively, without the agents or customers rejecting the Self-Boarding system.

Installation of the Self-Boarding system has been a very positive experience for Air France.

How would you describe your relationship with RESA?
As far as the RESA gates at Toulouse are concerned, RESA has been extremely responsive.
In general, our relationship with RESA is very positive.
I salute RESA's solid expertise, extensive knowledge of the airport environment and high level of responsiveness.