

ASBTA: Security Advances at Major Airports Offer Time-Saving Opportunities for Small Business Travelers

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More Efficient Travel Can Be Achieved by Recognizing New Applications of Advanced Technology

Small business travelers can help improve their airport experience by understanding airport security advances and following good security practices, reported the American Small Business Travelers Alliance (ASBTA). ASBTA is a national, non-profit alliance that provides valuable services and functions focused specifically on the travel needs and interests of small business owners.

"As much as business travelers appreciate the need for heightened and thorough security at our nation's airports, there's no question that they dread the long waits that often go with it," said Chuck Sharp, ASBTA President. "What many small business travelers may not know is that there are steps they can take to make their airport experience faster and more efficient."

First, small business travelers can take advantage of new security advances cropping up at major airports around the country. For instance, many major airports are working closely with the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) to implement new technologies designed to both improve airport security and expedite lines at security checkpoints. One example is a type of screening machine that uses puffs of air to collect and electronically analyze passengers for traces of explosives. The machines do not replace standard metal detectors, but are used to provide extra scrutiny of selected passengers to check for hidden bombs and eliminate the need for time-consuming hand searches. The TSA began testing the machines last year in a limited number of airports and is expanding the test to include the busiest U.S. airports by January 2006, including Dulles, LaGuardia and Dallas-Fort Worth. Visit www.tsa.gov for a full list of participating airports.

Another TSA security advancement is called the Registered Traveler pilot program, which allows approved travelers to be positively identified at airport security checkpoints by the use of biometric technology, such as fingerprints or iris scans. Travelers must go through an application process and security assessment, but once approved enjoy expedited security lines and are not randomly selected for secondary screening.

The TSA's pilot program is limited to five major U.S. airports and just 10,000 select travelers. However, Orlando International Airport is poised to begin a similar pilot program in July. Frequent travelers who pass background checks, provide biometric information and pay a fee of \$80 will receive a smart card that enables them to utilize expedited security screening. Although programs like these are limited and still in early testing phases, they have the potential to create not only more sophisticated security screenings and faster service for frequent travelers, but also shorter lines for all airport passengers.

More immediately, many major airports have taken steps to improve security and speed-up checkpoints using methods that range from the simple to the highly advanced. For instance, Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport announced in May that it implemented a number of improvements to make passenger experience at security checkpoints faster and easier, including providing plastic drawstring bags for valuables, disposable slippers for passengers who remove their shoes, and benches where they can sit to remove them. At the other end of the spectrum, D/FW announced in April that it has begun operation of the first phase of a \$220 million automated baggage system that allows passengers simply to drop off baggage at the ticket counter and eliminates the need for them to take part in additional screening measures.

While airports do their part to improve security and reduce security-related wait times, many bottlenecks are actually caused by passengers, so small business travelers should know what steps they can take to improve their experience. Something as simple as membership in an airline's free frequent flier program can help small business travelers expedite their wait at security lines since many airports offer exclusive access to members holding elite status.

Even without elite status, passengers can decrease their wait -- and that of others -- simply by preparing for entry into a security checkpoint. Ensuring that all items like keys, loose change, belt buckles and mobile phones are placed in carry-on luggage or in a plastic bag or bin well in advance of the checkpoint can often make a difference of a few minutes or more. Similarly, small business travelers should always remember to take laptops out of their cases and place them in a plastic bin and remove coats and even suit jackets as early as possible.

"Although nothing is going to completely eliminate waits at the airport, small business travelers -- especially those who travel frequently -- should feel empowered to do what they can to improve their own experience," said Sharp. "As is always the case, knowledge and awareness are two of the keys to this empowerment and we hope to help small business travelers garner both."

About ASBTA:

ASBTA is dedicated to educating the small business traveler and promoting the travel industry at large. The American Small Business Travelers Alliance (ASBTA) is a national, non-profit organization serving small business travelers by providing information regarding resources, services, and savings. If you're a small business owner and want to learn more, visit our site and register free at www.asbta.com. You can contact ASBTA by phone at 469-648-0190 or email us at info@asbta.com

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