

ALL ABOARD

AUTOMATED GATE ANNOUNCEMENTS CONTRIBUTE CONSIDERABLY TO THE EFFICIENCY AND UNIFORMITY OF BOARDING PROCEDURES



■ Amsterdam Airport Schiphol in the Netherlands, home to KLM Royal Dutch Airlines, began using an automated announcement system for the airport as early as 1996. Delivered by Dutch company AviaVox, the technology has since developed into a state-of-the-art system that can generate a high level of guaranteed natural speech in more than 30 languages. The quality is unique and cannot be distinguished from a human voice. AviaVox subsequently introduced an additional feature: the so-called Airline-Gate-Client, specially developed for announcements at the gate during boarding procedures. The system is now used by airports all over the world.

In 2008, KLM Royal Dutch Airlines was one of the first airlines to start using this automated announcement system for all its boarding procedures at Schiphol Airport. Paula van Leyen, shift leader preparation and boarding at KLM – the person responsible for the smooth functioning of the airline's boarding procedures at Schiphol airport – sees huge advantages in using the AviaVox Airline-Gate-Client announcement system during boarding procedures.

"In the old days, all boarding announcements were made live through a microphone," says van Leyen. "We trained our personnel for this task, but still, not everybody has the type of voice that is fit for making live announcements. Some voices are just too low or too raw, and others speak too fast or perhaps do not articulate clearly enough.

"Secondly, there is the issue of language," she adds. "Ideally, we address our passengers in their own language as much as possible. But because we could not ask our staff to speak all these languages, most gate announcements were limited to Dutch and English. With the AviaVox Airline-Gate-Client announcement system, we are currently using as many as eight languages to address our passengers during boarding procedures."

According to van Leyen, a big advantage of the AviaVox Airline-Gate-Client announcement system is that it contributes considerably to the uniformity and professionalism of the boarding procedures. "The AviaVox system contains the complete KLM announcement book, and reflects the several boarding phases that KLM uses," she explains. "When a gate agent starts up the application, the correct gate and flight

RIGHT: The AviaVox Airline-Gate-Client announcement system enables KLM to use up to eight languages to address passengers during boarding procedures

are automatically detected, and the boarding announcements can be started with one click of a mouse."

At the same time, it is very easy to adapt the announcements during every phase of the boarding process in accordance with the specifics of that particular flight by ticking or unticking some checkboxes. "For example, if there are no small children on a particular flight, we can untick the box 'Passengers with young children can come forward to board first' in the pre-boarding phase. This makes the system very dynamic, but at the same time very easy to use," says van Leyen.

By using the AviaVox Airline-Gate-Client system, gate agents have more time to perform other tasks, enabling them to pay more attention to the passengers. The system also helps passengers to move through the boarding process in an orderly and more efficient manner because they are well informed when it comes to boarding. The fact that staff no longer have to perform announcements in foreign languages is another major advantage.

Uniformity and flexibility

Within the industry, the complaint is often heard that automated announcement systems are too static, and that it takes a long time to implement additional announcements or make changes to existing ones. "This is not the case with AviaVox," explains van Leyen. "In day-to-day use the system is very dynamic, with the possibility to switch all kinds of announcements on or off according to the specific passenger list. And if we need to make some additions to our

The need to know what will happen next **is a psychological factor** that exists in each and every one of us

LEFT: Announcements can be adapted during every phase of the boarding process in accordance with the specifics of that particular flight

BELOW: Paula van Leyen is responsible for the smooth functioning of KLM's boarding procedures at Amsterdam Airport Schiphol



announcement book, we can contact the AviaVox staff directly. Their content management department usually responds very quickly to make the necessary adjustments. And of course, we are still able to grab the microphone and do a manual announcement if required. This is, for instance, the case when we need to call a passenger by name."

By deploying the AviaVox announcement system, KLM is able to address its passengers in a uniform and professional way. There is, however, still room for improvement. At KLM outstations where the AviaVox system is not yet operational, the uniformity of the announcements is lost. "If this could be improved, I am convinced that KLM as an organization could benefit even more," adds van Leyen.

In the modern aviation industry, customer experience is a key factor for all players. When it comes to departures, the AviaVox system plays a big part in contributing to that positive customer experience.

"The need to know what will happen next is a psychological factor that exists in each and every one of us. Because of that, access to information is a key factor in the level of comfort of a passenger. The AviaVox announcement system helps us to inform passengers in a timely fashion, often in their own language, about what is going to happen next. As a result, they are less anxious and more prepared to patiently wait their turn to board the aircraft. This has a positive influence on the level of comfort that passengers experience and that is what they will remember," concludes van Leyen. ■



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