



AIRLINES LOOK TO AVOID BAGGAGE BACKLOG

By Karon Warren

The CrowdStrike software update fiasco in 2024 not only caused multiple flight delays and cancellations but also caused passenger bags to pile up and even some baggage handling systems to fail.

On July 19, 2024, thousands of flights were disrupted resulting from a faulty software update to the CrowdStrike Falcon Sensor for Windows systems. Initially, approximately 1,500 flights were grounded in the United States. Based on Flightaware data, Delta Air Lines canceled 36% of its flights and delayed another 45%. But the airline was far

from alone. United Airlines, Endeavor Air, Spirit Airlines, easyJet, China Eastern Airlines, American Airlines and Lufthansa also suffered from canceled and delayed flights. Even 72 hours after the global IT outage, Delta still was not back online, leading to more canceled and delayed flights.

Not only were flight cancellations and delays piling up, so too were passengers'

baggage. At LaGuardia Airport in New York, the outage caused their baggage handling system to fail so airlines couldn't track and manage baggage. At Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, baggage piled up along baggage claim carousels and at airline customer service counters. This scene was replicated at airports around the globe. Passengers who had Apple's AirTag — a Bluetooth

tracking device — in their baggage watched helplessly as their bags moved through airports and on airplanes without them.

It took days for many passengers to be reunited with their baggage. So, what have airlines done to prevent such a backlog from happening again?

AIRPORTS PITCHED IN TO HELP

Although airports are not directly involved with baggage handling, they were faced with helping to do with unclaimed baggage that stacked up at baggage claims around the world. “We worked to support our airline partners so that they could do [reunite passengers with baggage] as efficiently as possible,” said Anika Robertson, assistant director of office of communications and public affairs for Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport. “This involved providing additional security presence in baggage claim areas where the backlog of bags was initially staged and offering up overflow space for bags to be stored until they could be brought to their owners. Our frontline teams worked to support not only our airline partners but all of our affected customers.”

TECHNOLOGY IMPROVES BAGGAGE HANDLING

While the CrowdStrike outage did hamper baggage handling, overall baggage handling continues to improve. According to the SITA Baggage IT Insights 2024 report, mishandled baggage decreased from 7.6 to 6.9 bags per thousand passengers. SITA credits this reduction to increased digitalization, AI use and computer vision tech in baggage handling. Examples include self-service technologies such as offering passengers unassisted bag drops and providing bag collection information directly to passengers’ mobile phones. In fact, many airlines already offer baggage tracking through their own mobile apps.

“Digitalization and automation of baggage processes is the key to addressing pain points while boosting

Apple announced a new feature where AirTag owners could share the item's location with others, including airlines. Apple image.

operational efficiency and customer satisfaction,” said Nicole Hogg, portfolio director for baggage at SITA, which specializes in air transport communications and information technology. “At SITA, we continue to work directly with airlines and airports to solve key issues in the baggage journey, harnessing advanced technologies like computer vision, machine learning, natural language processing and more.”

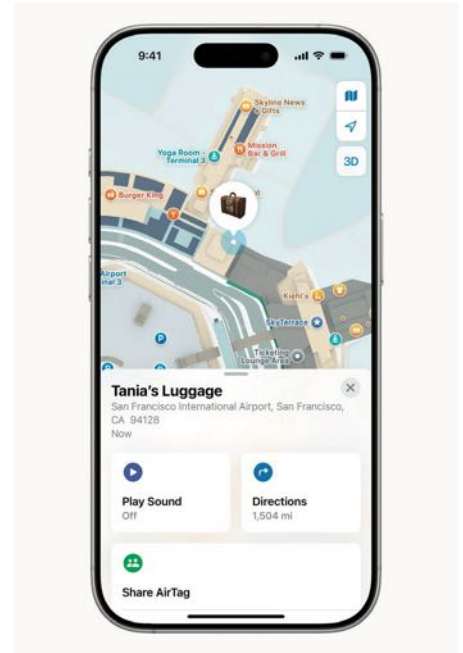
One example of those solutions is SITA’s WorldTracer Auto Reflight technology. If a rush bag doesn’t make its connecting flight, this solution automatically rebooks the bag on the next available flight using the same tag, without any human intervention needed, all while keeping the passenger informed.

Another example is SITA’s Auto Notify feature that is part of the WorldTracer solution. This feature proactively advises passengers when their bags have been mishandled so they aren’t waiting for luggage at baggage claim that isn’t coming. Instead, passengers receive an email or SMS notification that their bag hasn’t arrived, with a link to a self-service form where they can provide their details and where they want their bag delivered.

“These solutions all help manage disruptions in a more streamlined way that allows passengers more autonomy,” Hogg said. “SITA research has found that greater technology adoption giving passengers more autonomy and control in baggage processes correlates with more positive emotions from passengers. From 2016 to 2022, technology adoption at the bag collection stage rose from 0% to 29% of passengers receiving mobile notifications for bag collection. In the same period, passengers reported a 9% increase in positive emotions at bag collection.”

PASSENGERS TAKE BAGGAGE TRACKING INTO THEIR OWN HANDS

Since they were first introduced in 2021,



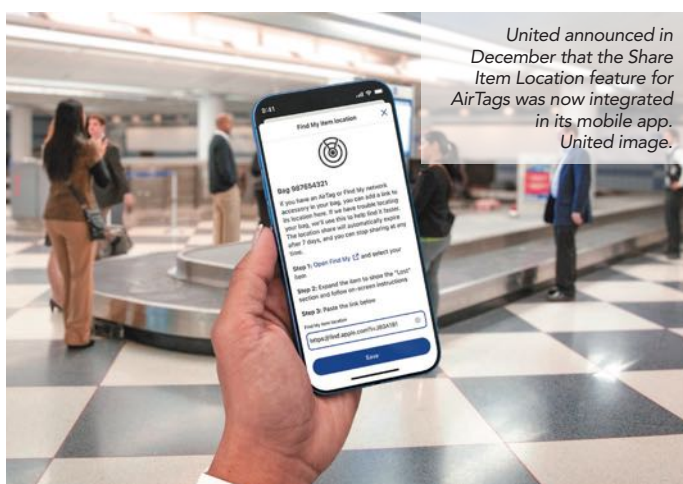
many passengers have purchased Apple AirTags to keep tabs on their luggage to ensure it arrives at their destination with them. In November, Apple announced a new feature where AirTag owners could share the item’s location with others, including airlines. A new iOS 18.2 feature, “Share Item Location” allows users to share the location of their AirTag or any “Find My Network” device. The shared location is disabled once the owner is reunited with their item, is disabled by the owner or automatically expires after seven days.

Apple announced more than 15 airlines will start accepting Find My item locations as part of their customer service process for locating mishandled or delayed bags. Participating airlines include:

- Aer Lingus
- Air Canada
- Air New Zealand
- Austrian Airlines
- British Airways
- Brussels Airlines
- Delta Air Lines
- Eurowings
- Iberia
- KLM Royal Dutch Airlines
- Lufthansa
- Qantas
- Singapore Airlines
- Swiss International Air Lines
- Turkish Airlines



SITA Baggage IT Insights 2024 report says mishandled baggage has decreased from 7.6 to 6.9 bags per thousand passengers.



- United
- Virgin Atlantic
- Vueling

In Apple's press release, Erik Snell, Delta Air Lines' senior vice president of airport customer service, cargo operations, ground support equipment and global clean, said the solution, developed by Apple and in partnership with Delta Air Lines, would enable the airline to locate items more efficiently and effectively. "While more than 99 percent of checked items make it to their destination as planned, we know how stressful it can be for customers when they don't," he said. "That's why we're excited to support Share Item Location beginning later this year."

In that same press release, Annalisa Gigante, head of innovation at IAG, the parent company of British Airways, Iberia, Vueling, Aer Lingus, and LEVEL, said accepting Find My Item locations would help the company offer its customers

bag through the United app as it is scanned on and off the plane, and, previously, they didn't have a way to directly share their AirTag information with our baggage team," said David Kinzelman, United's chief customer officer, in a company press release. "Now, Apple's new Share Item Location feature will help customers travel with even more confidence, knowing they have another way to access their bag's precise location with AirTag or their Find My accessory of choice. They can easily and securely share that with us in the United app, and our team can use the location information to find the bag and get it reunited with its owner much more quickly."

SITA also added support for Share Item Location in its WorldTracer solution. "While airline baggage tracking systems are highly effective on their own, passengers choosing to use their own additional tracking devices can sometimes

additional peace of mind. "We're always testing innovative solutions and enhancing our systems to ensure that checked bags reach their intended destination as quickly as possible, and we look forward to incorporating this solution into our lost baggage processes beginning later this year," she said.

In December, United announced the Share Item Location feature for AirTags was now integrated in its mobile app. "For years, every customer has been able to track the journey of their

speed up the process of baggage tracing and matching," Hogg said. "Passengers can now share their AirTag location via the Share Item Location into SITA WorldTracer, the baggage tracing system used by over 500 airlines and ground handlers at more than 2,800 airports around the world."

PREPARATION KEY TO PREVENTING FUTURE OUTAGES

The CrowdStrike outage caught airlines off guard and left them scrambling to recover. Now, both airlines and airports are working together to address such a situation if it arises again.

"ATL and our business partners have comprehensive contingency plans to respond to an outage of the baggage handling system," Roberson said. "This involves redundancy built into the system, alternative paths within the system to move baggage and alternative measures in the event multiple components of the system are inoperative. Our plan also includes scheduled structured testing and evaluation of these plans through discussion-based exercises to ensure that those with responsibilities in the plan are well informed."

SITA has taken a similar stance. "The benefits of technology on improving the passenger experience are undeniable," Hogg said. "But the risk of an outage is always present for major IT systems. The most important proactive measure that can be taken is to build resiliency into systems, so you can bring them back quickly and minimize the impact on service. In keeping with this proactive approach, at SITA we have robust processes in place to protect our core systems, including internal support teams managing all updates through strict change management practices. This allowed all of our core backend baggage services to stay up and running throughout the CrowdStrike outage."

Of course, it remains to be seen exactly how airlines will respond if faced with another outage on the scale of the CrowdStrike outage. One thing does seem sure: they are taking steps to ensure it won't have the same effect.

GUZZETTI AVIATION RISK DISCOVERY

Be on GuARD!

*GuARD specializes
in:*

- > Air Accident Reconstruction
- > Training Safety Professionals
- > Emergency Response Planning
- > Safety Audits & Surveys
- > Technical Representation
- > Crisis Communications
- > Report & Document Writing



Are you prepared to deal with the aftermath of an accident ?

Accidents and serious incidents are relatively rare events that typically involve complex, challenging and stressful situations. Organizations may have little experience in dealing with these events, but they can significantly reduce the negative impact of them with preparation, training, and solid council.



We are "GuARD" ... Guzzetti Aviation Risk Discovery

GuARD is a business venture committed to improving aviation safety around the world through education, investigation, and consultation – while providing a means to feed our passion for aviation and to pass on a wealth of corporate knowledge regarding aircraft accident/incident investigation.

With over 35 years of experience to promote aviation safety, Jeff Guzzetti is taking his experience and training knowledge to the next level. He is not only a commercial-rated pilot, aerospace engineer, auditor, and instructor, but also an experienced air safety investigator and government executive.

(202) 600-5002 - Jeff@Guzzettiaviation.com