Beyond Self-Service

Building a Coordinated Path to Self-Servicing Across the Airline Retailing Value Chain

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A common framework for airlines and industry partners to align expectations, capabilities, value drivers and success measures for self-servicing in an Offers and Orders environment.

Self-servicing is frequently cited as **one of the most important outcomes of airline retailing transformation**. Yet across the industry, stakeholders often have different interpretations of what self-servicing means, what capabilities are required, and how progress should be measured.

To move from ambition to progress, the industry needs a **common foundation**.

This in Focus presents **six focus areas** identified through industry engagement. Together, these areas establish a structured and coordinated approach for enabling self-servicing across value chain partners at scale:

1. Getting the definition right
2. Aligning value chain expectations
3. Monitoring IATA standards capabilities
4. Simplifying complex processes
5. Understanding cross-stakeholder value drivers
6. Establishing shared KPIs

Together, they provide a practical framework that can be used by airlines, travel sellers, aggregators, and other technology providers to prepare for self-servicing implementation and evaluate readiness across the ecosystem.

The Industry is moving to Offers and Orders

The airline industry is moving toward a retailing model built around Offers and Orders. Travelers increasingly expect the same flexibility and autonomy they experience in other digital retail sectors.

The transition to Offers and Orders creates the conditions for more effective self-servicing by simplifying how customer journeys are managed across the value chain. Rather than relying on multiple records and complex synchronization processes, an Order-based approach provides a common and more consistent servicing foundation for airlines, sellers, and technology providers.

This simplification helps reduce process complexity, supports automation, and enables a broader range of servicing interactions to be completed digitally. It makes self-servicing a tangible customer and business benefit of Modern Airline Retailing.

Looking ahead, the ambition is to:

- Enable travelers to manage changes independently.
- Handle disruptions proactively.
- Keep Orders synchronized across channels.
- Make manual intervention the exception rather than the norm.

Delivering this vision requires more than technology. It requires alignment across the entire value chain. While many organizations are progressing their own servicing capabilities, **scalable self-servicing will not be achieved through individual implementations alone**.

It depends on coordinated action across airlines, travel sellers, aggregators, and technology providers, supported by shared expectations, common capabilities, aligned value drivers, and consistent measures of success. Self-servicing is therefore a **shared responsibility across the airline retailing ecosystem**.

At its core, self-servicing is about improving the traveler experience. Customers increasingly expect the ability to manage their journey quickly, transparently and consistently, regardless of where they purchased their travel. Whether changing a flight, accepting an alternative during disruption, requesting a refund or managing ancillary services, travelers expect confidence that their requests can be completed seamlessly and without unnecessary effort.

Effective self-servicing gives customers greater control, faster resolution and clearer communication, while delivering a more seamless experience across channels. It also **represents one of the key value propositions** of an Offers and Orders environment by enabling, synchronized, end-to-end servicing across the value chain.

As the industry transitions to an Offers and Orders environment, the customer experience should remain the ultimate measure of success, with every improvement designed to reduce friction, remove complexity and increase confidence throughout the journey.

Key Industry Challenges

Industry discussions highlighted several recurring challenges that must be addressed to achieve scalable self-servicing across the value chain:

- Lack of a shared definition of self-servicing and what success looks like.
- Misaligned expectations between airlines, sellers, technology providers and other partners.
- Limited awareness of the standards-based capabilities already available to support self-servicing.
- Legacy processes and operating models that introduce unnecessary complexity.
- Difficulty articulating and prioritizing value across different stakeholder groups.
- Inconsistent approaches to measuring progress, and maturity.

Addressing these challenges requires a coordinated approach involving all stakeholders across the airline retailing ecosystem. The focus areas collectively establish a structured and coordinated path toward self-servicing readiness and scalable adoption across the industry.

Six Focus Areas for Self-Servicing Readiness

1. **Self-servicing definition**
Defines what self-servicing means in an Order-based world.

2. **Value chain expectations**
Outlines what the ecosystem needs and expectations.

3. **Workflow & capabilities alignment: airlines, agents, vendors**
Lists the concrete workflow capabilities documented under O&O and IATA implementation guide.

4. **Process simplification across stakeholders, systems, channels**
Focuses on simplifying business processes, reducing manual complexity.

5. **Cross–stakeholder value drivers**
Highlights the value drivers associated with self-servicing.

6. **Success factors and KPIs**
Defines the measures of progress across the value chain.

Source: iata.org/retailing; 1:1 interviews.

Through industry task force discussions and broader value-chain engagement, six focus areas emerged as priorities for establishing a coordinated approach to self-servicing. Together, they provide a practical framework for assessing readiness, aligning stakeholders, and guiding implementation efforts across the ecosystem.

Focus area	Objective	Key considerations	Expected impact
1. Self-servicing definition	Create a shared understanding of self-servicing within an Offers and Orders environment.	• Which servicing scenarios are included? • What level of traveler autonomy is expected? • Where does automation end and assisted servicing begin? • What role should each stakeholder play?	A shared language and common destination for all participants with the aim of enabling customers to enjoy a smoother and more reliable journey, with minimal complications, and giving them the assurance that their journey is being managed proactively and effortlessly.
2. Value chain expectations	Create alignment on ecosystem needs, responsibilities and expected benefits.	• Deliver true self-service parity (Direct and Indirect) • Supporting omni-channel by default • Airlines communicate with the traveler in case of disruption and schedule change. • Seller systems support post-travel processes seamlessly. • Reliability and industry-wide urgency and ownership within the value chain. • Radically rethinking servicing infrastructure and working together with urgency.	Clear ecosystem-wide expectations and stronger partner collaboration.
3. Workflow & capabilities alignment: airlines, agents, vendors	Create a clear view of servicing capabilities available through industry standards and implementation guidance.	• What capabilities are required to deliver self-servicing? • What capabilities are already supported through industry standards? • Where may additional industry alignment still be required?	Greater visibility of standard workflows, and servicing capabilities; stakeholders can assess readiness, and address remaining gaps.
4. Process simplification (across stakeholders, systems & channels)	Redesign servicing processes around simplicity and end-to-end efficiency.	• Design transformation efforts around customer value. • Avoid replicating legacy complexity in new systems. • Look out for automation enablers in the standard (Statuses, Offer conditions, OCN, Refund processing, etc.). • Focus on simplification—transparent and understandable Offer conditions.	Simpler, scalable processes that support automation and self-servicing.
5. Cross stakeholder value drivers*	While investment and prioritization decisions will remain specific to each stakeholder's business objectives, shared KPIs can help create a common understanding of how value is created across the retailing ecosystem and support more informed prioritization of self-servicing initiatives.	• Understanding stakeholder-specific outcomes. • Identifying measurable business value. • Comparing value realization across the ecosystem.	A shared understanding of how value is created across stakeholders, enabling more informed prioritization, investment decisions, and collaborative implementation across the value chain.
6. Success factors and KPIs	Establish a common framework for measuring progress toward self-servicing across the ecosystem.	• Measuring adoption of self-service capabilities. • Tracking operational and customer outcomes. • Assessing ecosystem readiness and maturity.	Stakeholders see where progress is being made, where challenges remain, and where coordinated action is needed toward a more seamless self-servicing environment.

This focus area provides the measurement framework that connects all preceding focus areas, ensuring that definitions, expectations, capabilities, process improvements and value realization can be evaluated against agreed outcomes and industry objectives.

* Importantly, this focus area goes beyond measuring benefits. It provides a mechanism for supporting new ways of working across airlines, TMCs, corporate buyers, technology providers, and other partners as the industry transitions into an Order-based world. Shared understanding of value helps align decision-making, implementation priorities, and collaborative investment across the value chain.

Call to Action

Self-servicing is one of the most visible measures of success in the transition to Modern Airline Retailing. Yet it cannot be delivered by any single organization acting alone.

The six focus areas outlined in this paper provide a practical framework for action. Organizations are encouraged to assess their current capabilities, identify gaps, engage their partners, and prioritize collaborative initiatives that advance self-servicing readiness across the ecosystem.

Airlines, travel sellers, corporate buyers, aggregators, and technology providers all play a role in creating a seamless servicing experience for travelers. The opportunity now is to move beyond individual initiatives and collectively address the barriers that continue to limit scale, consistency, and automation across the value chain.

The industry has already aligned around the vision. The next step is to align around execution.

Resources

The following resources can support organizations in progressing the focus areas identified in this paper

- Modern Airline Retailing – An Opportunity to Rethink Airline Business Processes: the latest Airline Retailing Consortium release highlights how simplifying airline business processes—centered around Offers and Orders—can enhance operational efficiency, customer centricity, and innovation. It showcases use cases in product creation, servicing, and interline collaboration to illustrate the strategic value of modernization.
- Modern Airline Retailing Value Framework, and the accompanying MAR shared Value Matrix, which provides a structured method for assessing value across participants in the airline retailing ecosystem. It distils the diverse viewpoints of airlines, sellers, technology providers, and corporate buyers into a common structure that clarifies where value emerges in an Offers and Orders world.
- Workflow Capabilities Verification Guidance offers insight and direction on each capability available under the ARM index, capabilities particular to servicing can be found under the Order and Setup sections.

Share Your Experience

The transition to an Order-based world is still evolving, and lessons learned across the industry are essential to accelerating progress. IATA invites airlines and industry partners to share:

- Self-servicing implementation experience
- Capability gaps and challenges
- Examples of successful collaboration.
- Process simplification opportunities
- Value realization insights
- Suggested industry success measures and benchmarks

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