Sacramento International Airport Is First in Line to Enjoy the Benefits of New Channeling Service

Airport officials chose Telos ID Designated Aviation Channeling (DAC) for secure, responsive and cost-effective submission of personnel information.

The airport and aviation industry has a new option for processing personnel biographic and biometric data. The U.S. Transportation Security Administration (TSA) has opened the field to competition, authorizing third-party Designated Aviation Channeling (DAC) services to provide more responsive and cost-effective service than in the past. The first airport to take advantage of this new option is Sacramento International Airport (SMF). Its officials are extremely pleased with the results.

Overview

Sacramento International Airport (SMF), part of the Sacramento County Airport System, is a mid-size facility that handles nearly 9 million passengers each year and more than 130 commercial flights daily. Around 3,500 personnel — direct airport employees, contractors, and concessionaires — are working at SMF at any given moment. These personnel need to be credentialed for access to Secure and Sterile areas throughout the airport.

Until recently there was only one TSA-approved service for channeling the information needed to vet badge applicants for criminal histories and security threat assessments (STAs). The service was typical of that delivered by a sole source provider: long wait times, lack of responsiveness, high costs, and lack of motivation to add or improve features that customers wanted.

The service involved a multi-step process that included daily bulk transmission of fingerprints, uploading spreadsheet-based STA data, and mailing or faxing right-to-work documents and immigration papers. It could take weeks to approve a single application.

But in 2011 the TSA approved the use of third-party Designated Aviation Channeling (DAC) services. The introduction of competition has led to innovative capabilities and customer-friendly service. SMF was the first airport in the U.S. to use the first of the new DAC services, offered by Telos ID, a global provider of identity management and protection solutions.

Bonnie Hankins, a 20-year veteran of airport security and operations, is the official at SMF in charge of ensuring that applicants have been cleared and have
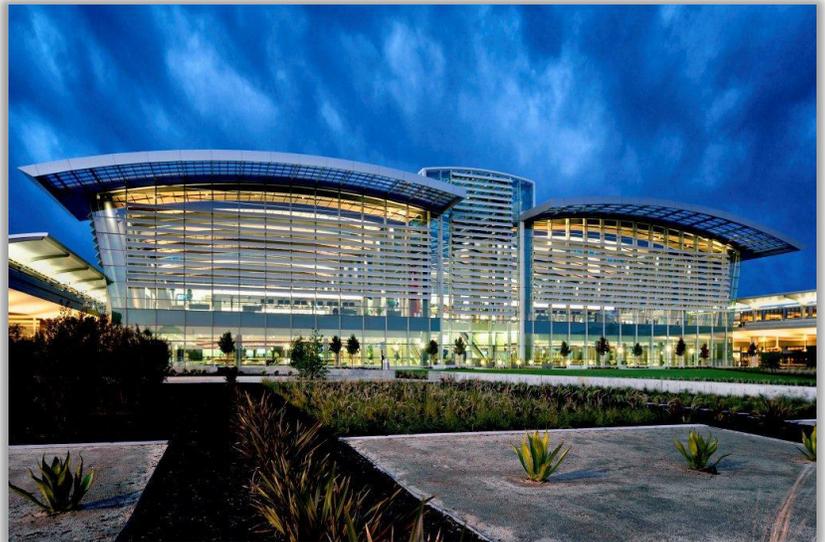
Sacramento International Airport's beautiful Terminal B opened in 2011. Its award-winning concessions are staffed by workers whose livelihoods depend on fast and accurate processing of their employment credentials.

the right credentials. The airport submits around 500 new hire enrollments and processes around 3,500 badge renewal applications each year. Hankins has three senior operations workers and a supervisor to handle the workload involved in submitting to TSA the information required for these applications.

It's fitting that SMF took the lead in adopting the new DAC service. Hankins notes that Hardy Acree, the recently retired director of airports for the Sacramento County Airport System, was an early advocate of competition in channeling. He had pressed TSA to introduce competition into the channeling environment. "We were eagerly awaiting the opportunity to 'choose' a channeling service provider and were first in line when TSA opened it up to competition," says Hankins.

The Selection Process

The first step in selecting a third-party DAC was a competitive bidding process. SMF officials issued an RFP that outlined the capabilities they needed, which included:

- Fingerprint and STA upload format that is easy to use, accurate, and efficient
- Dedicated customer support agents with specified response times for inquiries and requests
- Quality assurance verified by audits, internal controls and proven historical quality
- Accurate and timely billing with monthly statements and knowledgeable billing support staff
- Accountability, support for billing reconciliation, and granular reporting capabilities

Telos ID won the business in May 2012 following an evaluation of the proposals received. Since the system's deployment, Telos ID DAC service has paid dividends for SMF in expected and even in some unexpected ways.

"Our belief was and is that competition would result in lower costs and improved customer service," Hankins continues. "An unexpected bonus has been the speed with which results are received for STAs on applicants born outside the United States. The processing time has been reduced from several weeks, sometimes even months, to an average of about one week."

Benefits of the Telos ID DAC solution for Sacramento International Airport:

- Process fingerprints and STAs quickly and efficiently
- Receive expert service and support
- Reduce CHRC and STA fees
- Automate fingerprint Web capture
- Automate spreadsheet submissions
- Support slap and roll fingerprint capture
- Receive clear and transparent monthly bills with no reserve account required
- Eliminate redundant data entry
- Improve CHRC and STA process
- Attach I-9 documentation with original submission for faster TSA adjudication

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Fast and Secure Application Processing

The Telos ID DAC system lets airport officials submit new applications and renewals to TSA over a secure Web-based system. Data for individual applicants is

As the Airport Security Coordinator, Bonnie Hankins, AAE, is responsible for the development, implementation and management of SMF's TSA-required Airport Security Program (ASP). She also manages the airport's Access Control Office and acts as primary liaison with the Sacramento County Sheriff's Airport Division and the U.S. Transportation Security Administration (TSA).

housed in secure Web servers and protected by stringent TSA data encryption standards. Officials can log into the system and check the status of specific individuals' applications and the status of their STA and criminal history record check (CHRC).

One especially helpful feature is the ability to attach I-9, right-to-work papers, and other documentation with the original submission. STAs coming from TSA can be delayed if documentation is missing. The Telos ID system allows SMF personnel to upload the supporting documents at the same time as the original submission.

Hankins explains that the TSA made this feature optional for the new third-party DAC providers, but that Telos ID included it from the beginning. In fact, Hankins says that her staff didn't give this capability much thought at first. "But when we submitted our first application for an individual born outside the U.S. — a concessionaire employee — an official at TSA called and said that their adjudication center was thrilled with that attachment capability."

Hankins said they received the approved STA for that first applicant in just a week, as compared with several weeks or months it used to take for foreign-born applicants. Such delays can drive low-wage employees to look for work elsewhere.

"The concessionaire manager was very pleased that their applicant was approved so quickly," Hankins recalls. "This feature lets employees start working and earning sooner, so you're really talking about something that impacts a person's life."

Faster CHRCs

Hankins reports that the Telos ID DAC system has also improved the way CHRCs are processed. Personnel who need access to Sterile areas, Secured areas, the Airport Operations Area (AOA), and Security Identification Display Areas (SIDA) must undergo a fingerprint-based CHRC.

Sacramento County Airport System

LIVE SCAN FINGERPRINTING — TRANSACTION REPORTING

ENROLLMENT

DOCUMENT SUBMISSION

I-9 RIGHT-TO-WORK etc.

Reporting on transaction status, outcome and invoicing

TelosID DAC

TSA

STA and CHRC Checks

Generate status and outcome and forward to the DAC

Telos ID DAC gives airports, air carriers and aviation support vendors a responsive and cost-effective way to process STAs and CHRCs. This secure, Web-based service makes it easy to channel fingerprints and enrollment information to TSA and to meet additional personnel administrative needs.

The Telos ID system supports the most commonly used hardware and software for fingerprint collection and processing; for SMF, that meant not having to invest in new equipment. The system also supports both rolled and flat or "slap" fingerprints. "Slaps" make it faster and easier for both airport staff and job applicants to capture fingerprints at the front-end, with improved results and rapid real-time print channeling for quicker turnaround of completed CHRCs at the back end.

Hankins elaborates that the slap technique is easier to explain and demonstrate to non-English-speaking applicants, and the online submission of prints with the CHRC request has reduced the burden on SMF security personnel. "We have one person who processes about 95 percent of our prints, and he's been so happy," she explains. "He'll do a print, it's submitted in an instant, and he asks, 'Did I forget something? That was too fast.' Little things like that have all added up to make our employees very happy."

More Transparent Billing and Account Management

From a "housekeeping" perspective, a major advantage of the Telos ID system is transparent billing and account management. The previous channeling service required airports to pay in advance, maintaining an escrow account that was drawn down each month. That system didn't offer airports adequate visibility into their financial status. Airports often didn't know exactly what they were being charged for.

Hankins recalls that at one point, there was some confusion about how much was left in the airport's account, which had drawn down to zero. In response, the channeler cut them off — a terrible circumstance for a busy airport that handles so many time-critical applications. Now, with the Telos ID system, Hankins is invoiced at the end of each month, with billing that details exactly what the charges entail.

"This invoicing with 100% accountability is refreshing for us," says Hankins. "It's much easier on our end to process an invoice instead of wiring lump sums to an escrow account. It gives us the opportunity to account for every penny being charged before we pay and quickly address and resolve any discrepancies."

More Responsive Customer Service

The customer support provided with the previous channeling service also wasn't up to the standard of a commercial system. An example of this is that they only offered support during hours oriented to the Eastern Time zone. With Sacramento being in California, this often made it difficult for SMF officials to obtain the help and answers they needed.

By contrast, the Telos ID DAC system is provided with a range of services and capabilities that are geared to the needs of the customer. These include:

- A dedicated account representative
- A full-service customer care center that operates from 5:00 AM to 5:00 PM Pacific Time (8:00 AM to 8:00 PM Eastern)
- More flexibility in billing and account management
- Increased reporting on fees and invoices for more transparency

Hankins adds that while the Web-based application was already user-friendly, Telos ID regularly makes new enhancements to the system and has been extremely responsive in tweaking it for their requirements. "All my staff does is ask, 'What if this field did this instead of that?' And we get an e-mail saying that it's done."

Preparing to Change to a Third-party DAC System

Hankins recommends some initial steps for airports that are considering a third-party channeler:

1. **Be prepared to do some data checking and scrubbing.** Hankins points out that an airport's historical information comes from TSA, not from the previous channeler, so they should plan on reviewing it for possible inaccuracies that may have been introduced along the line. "We discovered some discrepancies that we hadn't anticipated, so plan on spending some time reviewing and scrubbing your data when you get it from TSA. We appreciated Telos ID's assistance with that process."

2. **Do end-to-end testing with real data before going live.** "We did several months of off-line testing with fictitious names, but we also followed that with end-to-end testing of real enrollments with TSA," Hankins explains. "That gave us the assurance that the actual system worked with real data, from us to TSA and back to us. So when we flipped the switch and made the system operational, it was completely seamless. Telos ID had the contacts at TSA to help us accomplish that."

3. **Be prepared for things to move faster.** It's entirely possible that many airports' hiring and vetting processes currently move at a pace set by the incumbent channeler. But with a new channeler, Hankins seriously stresses the importance of being ready for applications to be processed and results returned much faster.

One of these speed-related benefits has been fewer unclassifiable prints. "Those can take six weeks to process manually, so the fewer you have, the better," Hankins points out. After using the Telos ID system for a while, she noticed that they hadn't had to deal with any unclassifiable prints. Concerned that perhaps they'd been overlooked or forgotten, Hankins asked her staff if they had any pending — and there weren't any.

"All our prints have gone through without requiring manual processing since going to the Telos ID system," Hankins explains. "The prints go through, we get the CHRCs back. No one even anticipated this benefit; it was a pleasant surprise when we discovered it."

Finally, Hankins adds that she needed to modify their Airport Security Program (ASP) to reflect this change to the new DAC service, but that really was mostly an administrative task. Because SMF had already been trialing the system, their local TSA Federal Security Director (FSD) anticipated the change. "I can't imagine any FSD denying this modification," Hankins says. "The process is really just ensuring that your ASP is correct and accurate."

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Working with Telos ID

While SMF was anxious to start using a third-party DAC service, no enterprise wants to be on the "bleeding edge" and suffer through the pains of a new technology. Hankins says that any hesitation SMF officials had about being a groundbreaker were quickly overcome thanks to the extensive end-to-end live testing they conducted prior to the cutover and the comfort level they had with Telos ID by the time the big day arrived.
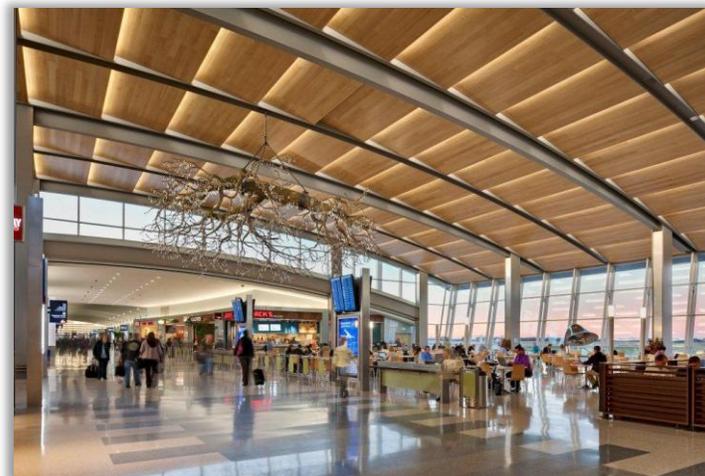
Nearly 9 million passengers fly through SMF each year. Airport personnel, airline employees, and concessions staff are critical to making their journeys as pleasant and efficient as possible.

She adds that working with Telos ID has been a very gratifying experience. "Literally everyone has been just great to deal with — very receptive to our desires and concerns, and very motivated to make adjustments based on customer feedback," she says. "I expected that on the front end since we were the first customer. But I'm increasingly amazed at the frequency that Telos ID enhances the system, improving its performance and our user experience."

One of these enhancements is a secure Web site where the airport's signatories (contractors, concessionaires, and third-party hiring agencies) can record their applicants' standard biographical data. Airport officials can then verify that information when the applicant comes in for fingerprinting. SMF officials are considering implementing this signatory portal to further reduce the workload for the airport's security staff and to streamline the credentialing process for applicants and employers alike.

"We feel great about our decision to make the change to the Telos ID DAC system," Hankins concludes. "It's been a heck of a ride so far."

Contact Telos ID to start saving time, money and aggravation with your channeling requirements.

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