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Project Nominations

Know of a project that should be covered in a future issue of Airport Improvement?

Baggage

Independent, Integrated Lab Puts Baggage Systems to the Test

By Jodi Richards

As published in: [Airport Improvement Magazine - January-February 2012](#)

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Publisher's Blog

Are You Leveraging Your Natural Resources?

Airports generally aren't situated atop deposits of minerals, gas or other resources that can readily be turned into

cash. And taking passengers' gold and silver fillings is probably out of the question. There are, however, ways to mine airports' other hidden assets. [\[more\]](#)

Ramping Up

The primary reason this issue is "special" is broadcast on its cover: Runway & Ramp Special



The Airport Integration Test Lab was officially inaugurated at Vic Thompson Company (VTC) headquarters in Arlington, TX, in October to offer objective third-party testing of baggage systems and passenger screening in an operationally realistic environment.



Victor Thompson

VTC chief executive officer Victor Thompson describes it as "system of systems" testing, because the lab will run trials of individual components as well as system configurations as part of a larger, more comprehensive system. Specifically, it integrates checked baggage inspection, baggage system flow and passenger screening. The 33,500-square-foot facility also offers companies the rare opportunity to push their equipment and systems to the limits without risking negative effects for customers.

"We as a firm have always felt it was important to understand the different products that we specify when we're designing systems - how well they work, limitations and making sure they're applied in the right applications," says Thompson.

After years of internal testing to support its own system designs, VTC decided to invest in creating a facility for the industry as a whole - a unique venue where companies could have



Edition. The number of great story ideas continuing to pour in about airfield operations was so incredible, devoting an entire issue to the topic was simply one of those "duh" moments. [\[more\]](#)

Do Something

The difference between the forces of action and inaction has seemingly never been greater. [\[more\]](#)



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Industry Insider

Accountability is the Answer

Airport Improvement Magazine generally discusses success stories in the industry, but airports don't always win, do they? Too often they end up on the short end of the stick during construction projects. We give airports and their project teams credit when it's due, but who is accountable when airports lose? [\[more\]](#)

Shovel-Ready, But Not Wallet-Ready

It's good news that the FAA reauthorization put 74,000 people back to work and will keep the FAA funded until mid-September. Even though this is a "maintenance patch" - the 20th one since the last FAA reconstruction - it's better than no program

their products tested in a fully networked system and have results quantified by a neutral party, he explains. VTC has also performed operational field-testing of new and reconstructed security systems for TSA for roughly five years.

As the design-builder of TSA's Transportation Systems Integration Facility (TSIF) at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport, the firm knows just how valuable such a test facility can be, notes VTC president Robin Baughman. "While TSA clearly has providence over the detectability and compatibility of security technology components, we realized a gap exists for the larger stakeholder community," she explains. "Independent testing can identify the broader quality and costs of ownership facts about these systems, which at airports span a broader scope of focus than the TSIF provides."



Robin Baughman

Warm Reception

Thompson reached out to the International Association of Baggage System Companies (IABSC) and its member companies to find participants for the test facility's first baggage screening configuration. Response to the request was overwhelming, he recalls, with about 50 companies attending a preliminary meeting that provided an overview of the concept.

Ultimately, VTC had to turn away some manufacturers because there was not enough room for all interested companies to participate in the initial configuration.



While Thompson's firm developed a design for the test facility, industry vendors provided the equipment to fill it. The first test system of a baggage handling configuration included 23 manufacturing participants. "This is a collaborative effort with the industry," he relates, noting that airports, TSA, equipment makers and IT providers all stand to benefit from the new facility.

Bringing manufacturers together - especially those that often compete for business - was no small feat. Thompson credits IABSC president Bruce McMickle for helping promote the idea and encouraging participants to "play nice together."

According to Thompson, there is enough room in the industry for multiple manufacturers to succeed. "It comes down to how smart we are in selling our services and products," he says, "but we've got to make sure we are delivering the best solutions to our customers."

Even though many of the participating companies are competitors, McMickle says they are also "good corporate citizens that want to improve the industry." The trade organization and the test lab have the same main goal, he adds: helping companies improve the products they deliver.

Industry Benefits

One of the initial 23 participants is ControlTouch Systems, which provided electrical engineering, software development and design for a portion of the checked baggage inspection system. Company president Frank Dahl was attracted to the research and development opportunities. He also hopes to gain valuable exposure with VTC and its customers.



Bruce McMickle

factsfigures

Project: Airport Integration Test Lab

Location: Vic Thompson Co. Headquarters, Arlington, TX

Dahl considers the Airport Integration Test Lab a great place to develop and test ideas in a "real-world airport environment," without real-world consequences if everything doesn't work as expected.

Dahl also views the test lab as a place to prove a firm's hardware and services, which could ultimately lead to a spot on approved vendor lists. This, he notes, allows a firm to take its solution "a little further along and provide more cutting edge, new ideas, new techniques that will not only



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at all. [\[more\]](#)

Getting Customer Service Right

Customer service is an important part of business. Airports have seen a trend in lower customer satisfaction and are working to improve it. [\[more\]](#)

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Size: 33,500 sq. ft.

Purpose: Independent testing of components & systems, integrating checked baggage inspection, baggage system flow & passenger screening

Inaugural Participants

Conveyor OEMs: Bulloch Fabricating, G&S Airport Conveyor, G&T Conveyor Company, Glidepath, Portec, Siemens & Transnorm

Motor/Reducer OEMs: Baldor, SEW Eurodrive, Siemens, Sumitomo and Van der Graaf

VFD OEMs: SEW, Siemens & Rockwell Automation

BHS Controls, Photo Eyes, Device Cabling OEMs: Automated Dynamics Corp, Banner, & Turck

Networks OEMs: Rockwell Automation's ControlNet/DeviceNet & Ethernet, Siemens Asi/Profibus

Laser TagReader & Bag Measuring Array OEM: SICK

Encoder OEMs: Fraba, Turck, Rockwell Automation & Siemens

CBIS System Programming Firms: Upper Level: Alliant Technologies

Lower Level: ControlTouch Systems for ControlNet/Device Net & Ethernet

Lower Level: Siemens for Asi/Profibus

Static Diverter OEM: Globe Composite Solutions

Belting OEM: Forbo Movement Systems

CBRA Inspection Table OEM: Lucasey

elevates participants to a new level, Thompson says. It will also encourage more creative thinking and better solutions for airport security screening, he adds.

Future Testing

Following the initial configuration, manufacturers can pay to have their products or systems tested at the Airport Integration Test Lab. Participating manufacturers will have the opportunity to review test results and decide whether to include them in VTC's report to the industry, which is expected to be issued at least twice a year.

Dahl expects that his firm will use the test lab in the future and is currently working on a proposal to replace some of his company's existing equipment in the test loop with newer hardware.

cutting-edge, new ideas, new techniques that will not only save the industry money, but provide better functionality."

Thompson similarly sees the lab's role as twofold: stabilizing known practices and supporting the innovation of new concepts.



Jeremy Peake

Jeremy Peake, sales engineer for Rockwell Automation, considers the collaborative test facility as a "step in the right direction" that will move the whole industry forward. "It gives (companies) a way to test the performance of different technologies in a non-biased way ... then allowing the industry to feel comfortable adopting these new technologies," he notes.

According to Peake, the neutral nature of the test facility is key. "For the airlines and airports to trust the consultants, they need to feel comfortable that they're making non-biased recommendations and that they truly are designing based on the best possible solutions for their customers," he explains.

McMickle agrees: "You can talk to customers, airports and airlines about your products and even have your own test loop, but there's no better place to test your product than a third party's actual loop."

Thompson is keenly aware of the need to keep the lab impartial. "Our objectivity in the testing process is critical to everyone's success," he stresses.

Supporting TSA

According to Baughman, the neutral venue will provide testing that will complement TSA's work and possibly streamline its operations. "When they get equipment to test, they've got literally hundreds, if not thousands, of shall statements that they're measuring against," she says. "If we could help in some way to narrow those shall statements, we think it would make them more efficient and allow them to use their special expertise more focused."

"We are looking at [the test facility] as a support to the TSA, indirectly," adds Thompson. The lab follows test principles established by the Department of Defense, the Departments of the Army and Air Force, the Department of Homeland Security, FAA and TSA, he notes. "We're trying to follow already well-established, good testing processes and methods," he explains. "When results are given back to the TSA on checked bag inspection systems or passenger screening integration, they meet their stringent testing expectations."

Thompson says following high standards adds credibility to the lab's testing process and demonstrates objectivity. "When the data goes out to the industry, it is meaningful," he emphasizes.

With TSA assessing systems and technologies designed to detect potential threats, evaluation by an independent lab



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The flexibility to replace individual components as new technologies or requirements evolve not only benefits manufacturers like ControlTouch but airports and the overall industry as well, notes Thompson. Rather than stripping out everything and starting anew, airports with legacy systems can now test how new components could be integrated into existing systems. "You become more cost-effective to the taxpayer, and it's just as efficient and performs as well or better," Thompson notes.

[Airport Improvement Magazine - January-February 2012](#)

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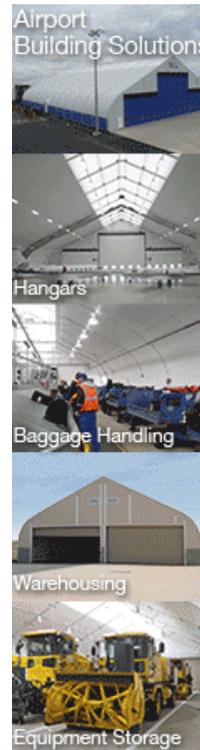
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