E-Tickets for Air Travel by End of 2007

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Today I turn to a tidbit I ran across as I was updating my INFOSEC Year in Review database <http://www.mekabay.com/iyir> in preparation for upcoming courses. It seems that the International Air Transport Association (IATA) hopes to see all paper airline tickets issued outside airports disappear totally by the end of 2007. <http://www.washtimes.com/functions/print.php?StoryID=20060605-114856-3500r>

According to the article by Kara Rowland of the _Washington Times_, a paper ticket issued by a travel agent costs about $10 in materials and processing versus about $1 for the electronic version issued at the airport by a desk agent or at an electronic kiosk.

Readers might want to consider the risks of depending entirely on an airline’s computer, database and personnel as the sole repositories of proof of their purchases. What exactly would we do if a software glitch or a user error were to try to send us to San Salvador when we needed to fly to San Diego or to wipe out all records of our flight? Even worse, what if the ticket information is lost after we get to our destination and before we fly home?

In today’s security environment, not having a ticket home could be a significant problem. My wife’s dear uncle, a distinguished-looking neurosurgeon in his seventies, recently got stuck in a Florida airport because of bad weather in his destination city, Boston. He tried to get anywhere further north and eventually agreed to buy a one-way ticket to Atlanta. When he went through security, he was taken aside and thoroughly interrogated – because everyone with a one-way ticket gets listed automatically as a security threat.

As a programmer since 1965, a long-time reader of the RISKS FORUM DIGEST <http://catless.ncl.ac.uk/Risks/>, and a teacher of programming and software quality assurance for more than 25 years, I have to say that I print my own records of all Internet-based ticket purchases and carry them with me to the airport. You might want to consider doing the same.

Of course, if airline personnel really insist that there never was a ticket, perhaps we’ll be accused of forging the papers we are carrying. I wonder what kind of security interrogation that would occasion?

Sigh.

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