



# The Contactless Travel Experience

RCS from Booking to Baggage Claim



[www.signal mash.com](http://www.signal mash.com)

# Executive Summary

Your customers are tired of downloading apps they'll use twice a year. They're frustrated with email confirmations buried in crowded inboxes. They're anxious when flight changes happen and nobody tells them until they arrive at the gate.

The travel industry has a communication problem. Airlines, hotels, and travel companies send critical information through channels customers don't check consistently. When problems arise, passengers scramble to find customer service phone numbers, wait on hold, and struggle to get real-time answers when they need them most.

Rich Communication Services (RCS) changes this equation completely. This isn't another app customers need to download or another portal they need to bookmark. It's a native messaging experience that works in the text messaging app already on their phone, delivering boarding passes, gate changes, hotel check-in details, and instant customer service in one continuous conversation.

This whitepaper examines how RCS creates a complete contactless travel experience from the moment someone books a trip through baggage claim, explores the technical implementation across different travel touchpoints, and demonstrates the measurable impact on customer satisfaction and operational efficiency in the US market.

# The Travel Communication Crisis

## App Fatigue is Real

Every airline wants customers to download their app. Every hotel chain pushes app downloads. The problem? Customers don't want 15 travel apps on their phone for services they use once or twice a year.

Research shows that 25% of apps are used only once after download, and for travel apps specifically, the numbers are worse. Customers download the app before a trip, use it during travel, and delete it immediately after to reclaim storage space.

This creates a broken communication loop where airlines can't send push notifications to customers who deleted the app, and hotels can't provide mobile keys to guests who never downloaded the app in the first place.

## Email Doesn't Work for Time Sensitive Updates

Travelers don't constantly refresh their email while moving through airports, checking into hotels, or exploring destinations.

Critical, time-sensitive information gets buried in inbox clutter alongside promotional messages and spam. Even worse, email lacks the interactive capabilities modern travelers expect.

You can't tap a button in an email to change your seat assignment, accept a room upgrade, or confirm a rental car modification.



## **SMS Limitations Hurt Travel Communication**

Some travel companies rely on SMS for critical updates, but SMS has crippling limitations for travel use cases. You can't send a scannable boarding pass through SMS.

The 160-character limit prevents sending complete itineraries. There's no way to include visual elements like terminal maps, hotel photos, or rental car location guides. Travelers receive fragmented communication across multiple channels and are forced to piece together their travel information like solving a puzzle.

# **Complete Customer Journey Through RCS**

## **Booking Confirmation That Actually Helps**

RCS booking confirmations arrive as rich message cards showing the destination with an appealing image, key trip details in scannable format, and immediate action options through clickable buttons.

The rich card format supports up to 8,000 characters, meaning all essential booking details, policies, and contact information fit in a single, organized message.

The booking confirmation isn't just information delivery but the start of an ongoing conversation where customers can reply with questions, make modifications through guided message flows, or add ancillary services without leaving the message thread.

## **Pre-Travel Preparation**

The week before travel, RCS enables proactive communication that helps customers prepare. Three days before departure, an RCS message arrives with the verified sender badge displaying your airline or hotel brand.

For hotel stays, pre-arrival messages offer early check-in if available, room upgrade options with pricing displayed in carousel format, and the ability to specify preferences through quick reply buttons.

Travel document reminders happen automatically using RCS Basic for critical alerts, with international travelers receiving passport verification prompts and domestic travelers getting ID requirement reminders.

## **Day of Travel: Airport Experience**

Morning of departure, the boarding pass arrives via RCS Studio as a rich card showing the scannable barcode optimized for gate scanner compatibility, flight details, terminal and gate information, and current flight status.

The boarding pass card updates automatically if gates change, flights are delayed, or boarding times shift. Gate changes trigger immediate notifications through RCS Basic verified messaging with your airline's verified branding and logo.

Flight delays come with proactive rebooking options delivered through RCS Studio, where customers see alternative flight options as a carousel and can complete rebooking instantly without calling customer service.

## **Hotel Check-In Revolution**

RCS enables true mobile check-in through verified messaging. The day of arrival, an RCS Studio message arrives with your hotel's verified branding offering to complete check-in and go straight to the room.

Mobile key delivery happens through RCS Studio with a scannable QR code that opens the room door, along with room number, floor location, and a rich card showing hotel amenity locations on an interactive map.

Room issues get resolved faster through RCS communication, where customers can message the hotel's verified RCS number and receive immediate automated or live agent responses.

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## Ground Transportation

When a customer's flight lands based on flight tracking data, an RCS Basic alert arrives with rental car shuttle pickup information. For enhanced experiences using RCS Studio, customers receive a rich card with a visual map showing exactly where to go, real-time shuttle tracking, and action buttons.

Hotel shuttles work the same way, with RCS Studio messages arriving when customers collect their baggage, showing vehicle photos, driver names, and exact pickup locations on maps.



## Post-Travel Follow-Up

After departure, RCS provides trip summary information, receipts for business travelers, and loyalty program status updates through verified messaging. Feedback requests happen conversationally through RCS Basic for simple ratings or RCS Studio for more detailed surveys.

Instead of receiving a long survey email three days after travel, customers get a simple verified message with quick reply buttons for star ratings. Response rates for this conversational feedback approach are 3-4x higher than traditional email surveys.

# Mobile Boarding Pass Implementation

## Technical Implementation for US Market

RCS boarding passes in the US market use rich card message formats with embedded barcodes that airport scanners recognize. Major US carriers including Delta, United, American, Southwest, and Alaska Airlines have infrastructure compatible with digital boarding passes delivered through verified messaging channels.

Signalmas RCS Studio handles this complexity through optimized rich card templates designed specifically for airline boarding passes, generating boarding pass rich cards with standardized barcode formats and appropriate sizing for different screen resolutions.

For customers whose devices don't support RCS Studio, the system automatically falls back to SMS with a secure link to view the boarding pass in a mobile web format. Dynamic updates present another technical challenge, which RCS Studio solves by supporting message updates that modify existing rich cards in the customer's message thread. Gate changes update the displayed gate number, terminal map if included, and boarding time in real-time as airline systems record changes.

## Security and Verification

RCS security happens at multiple levels. The customer's phone number is verified at the carrier level before sending boarding passes, with T-Mobile, Verizon, and AT&T all supporting verified sender authentication.

Message encryption protects boarding pass data in transit using transport layer security encryption between the airline's messaging platform and the customer's device. Barcodes in RCS boarding passes include the same security features as traditional boarding passes, including encrypted passenger data, tamper detection codes, and time-based validation.

## **Check-In Flow Optimization**

RCS dramatically improves check-in rates because it makes the process visible and convenient. Traditional check-in reminders via email get 15-20% engagement, while RCS check-in reminders achieve 60-70% engagement due to higher visibility, verified sender trust, and interactive functionality.

Twenty-four hours before departure, the check-in reminder arrives as an RCS Studio rich card with your airline's verified branding, displaying current flight status, seat assignment, and a prominent Check In Now action button. The check-in flow uses RCS interactive capabilities to streamline the process.

A rich card displays the current seat assignment with a simple seat map visualization, and action buttons offer Keep Seat or Change Seat. Baggage information gets confirmed through quick reply buttons, and for international flights, passport information gets verified through text input or document upload. The entire check-in process completes in under two minutes.

## **Baggage Tracking Integration**

SITA Baggage Report data shows US airlines handle approximately 7.5 mishandled bags per 1,000 passengers. RCS doesn't prevent bags from getting misrouted, but it makes tracking and recovery substantially better through proactive communication and real-time status updates.

When bags are checked, customers receive confirmation via RCS Basic verified messaging with baggage claim information. As bags move through the system, status updates can be delivered through RCS Basic alerts for airlines with bag tracking infrastructure.

If bags are delayed or misrouted, customers know immediately through RCS Basic alerts with proactive communication about when the bag will arrive and delivery arrangements. Delivery coordination happens through RCS Studio for enhanced experiences, with rich cards showing estimated delivery time, delivery service information, and action buttons to confirm or update addresses.

# Real-Time Travel Alert Systems

## Flight Status Monitoring

Flight status monitoring through RCS is proactive rather than reactive. The system monitors flights from 24 hours before departure through landing, with integration to FlightAware, FlightStats, or airline operations systems providing real-time status data that triggers RCS alerts when changes occur.

Delays trigger RCS Basic verified messages with new departure times and reason for delay if available. For longer delays or multiple changes, RCS Studio provides more comprehensive information with rich cards displaying original time, revised time, delay reason, and action buttons for rebooking options.

Cancellations trigger immediate notification with automatic rebooking through RCS Studio, where the message includes your new boarding pass as a scannable rich card, compensation information if applicable, and action buttons to accept rebooking or view other options. Weather delays include contextual information delivered through RCS Basic to help passengers understand the situation and set realistic expectations.



# Customer Satisfaction and Business Impact

## Measuring the Difference

Airlines and hotels implementing RCS communication see measurable NPS improvements. Industry case studies from early RCS adopters in travel show NPS increases of 12-18 points on average, with some implementations seeing gains of over 20 points.

Delta Air Lines reported in their Q2 2024 earnings that digital communication improvements, including enhanced mobile messaging, contributed to their highest customer satisfaction scores in company history.

The J.D. Power 2024 North America Airline Satisfaction Study found that passengers who receive proactive flight status updates through mobile messaging rate their overall experience 89 points higher on a 1,000-point scale than passengers who have to actively seek out flight information

## Response Rate Improvements

Traditional travel surveys sent via email get response rates of 2-5% according to Medallia and Qualtrics industry benchmarks. RCS surveys achieve response rates of 15-25% based on early adoption data from US travel companies.

The difference comes from timing, convenience, and format. RCS surveys arrive at the right moment when the experience is fresh, they're quick to complete with suggested reply buttons, and they feel like natural conversation rather than formal surveys.



## **Gate and Terminal Changes**

RCS gate change notifications are impossible to miss. The message arrives as a push notification with your airline's verified branding and logo, and an RCS Basic alert provides clear information about the gate change with walking time estimates.

For customers using RCS Studio capabilities, enhanced gate change notifications include visual wayfinding with airport terminal maps showing the new gate highlighted and suggested walking routes.

Terminal changes at major US airports get special handling through RCS Studio. Some airports like Atlanta, Dallas/Fort Worth, and Denver have multiple terminals requiring security exit and re-entry or inter-terminal transportation, and RCS Studio messages include terminal maps showing transportation options and estimated transit times.

## **Passenger Rights and Compensation**

When flights are significantly delayed or cancelled, passengers have rights to compensation, meals, or hotel accommodations under Department of Transportation regulations and airline policies. RCS enables transparent communication about passenger rights delivered through verified messaging.

For delays exceeding three hours, an RCS Basic alert informs passengers about meal voucher eligibility. For overnight delays requiring hotel accommodation, the logistics happen through RCS Studio with rich cards showing hotel details, confirmation numbers, shuttle information, and action buttons.

## Resolution Time for Customer Issues

Traditional customer service through phone calls has average wait times of 15-20 minutes during peak travel periods according to industry benchmarks. RCS customer service achieves average response times of under 2 minutes for automated responses and 5-8 minutes for live agent responses based on early implementation data.

Airlines using RCS for customer service report 30-40% reduction in average handle time compared to phone-based service, with agents able to handle 3-4 concurrent RCS conversations compared to one phone call at a time.

## Reduced Call Center Volume

Airlines implementing comprehensive RCS communication see call center volume reductions of 20-35% according to early adoption reports. Industry cost analysis shows that phone calls to airline customer service cost \$5-8 per call, including agent labor, telephony infrastructure, and support systems.



A regional carrier with 10 million annual passengers, averaging 0.5 customer service calls per passenger, handles 5 million calls annually. At \$6 per call, that's \$30 million in annual call center costs. If RCS diverts 25% of those calls, the carrier saves \$7.5 million per year.

## **Ancillary Revenue Growth**

Seat upgrade offers at check-in convert at 3-4x higher rates through RCS compared to email according to early adoption data. The RCS Studio presentation includes visual seat maps, clear pricing, and one-tap acceptance.

United Airlines reported in industry presentations that their mobile ancillary revenue increased 35% year-over-year after implementing enhanced mobile messaging for upgrade offers. Travel insurance attach rates improve with RCS delivery, with contextual timing immediately after booking and easy purchase flow driving conversion rates 2-3x higher than email insurance offers.

# **Implementation Considerations**

## **Integration With Existing Systems**

RCS doesn't replace your existing travel technology stack but integrates with it. The platform connects to airline passenger service systems like Amadeus, Sabre, and Radixx, hotel property management systems like Opera, Maestro, and Guesty, and customer relationship management tools like Salesforce and Microsoft Dynamics.

API-based integration enables real-time data flow, where flight status changes in operations systems trigger RCS platform updates within seconds through webhook notifications or API polling.

Most travel companies implement RCS in phases. Start with high-value, low-complexity use cases like booking confirmations and flight status alerts that require read-only API access to booking and flight status data. Prove value through measurable metrics including customer satisfaction scores, call center volume reduction, and ancillary revenue from upgrade offers. Build confidence and internal support, then expand to more sophisticated workflows like automated rebooking and interactive check-in flows that require write access to booking systems.

## **Privacy and Data Protection**

Travel communication involves sensitive personal information including passport details, payment information, location data, and travel itineraries. RCS implementations must protect this data rigorously in compliance with US privacy regulations and industry standards.

Encryption protects messages in transit using transport layer security encryption between the airline's messaging platform and the customer's device, meeting Payment Card Industry security standards for any messages containing payment-related information.

California Consumer Privacy Act compliance for California residents requires explicit consent, clear data usage policies, and easy opt-out mechanisms. RCS makes this straightforward through conversational opt-in flows where customers receive clear information about how their phone number will be used and can reply STOP anytime to opt out.

The opt-out process is simple, immediate, and respected across all communication, with customers removed from all marketing and promotional messages while maintaining critical travel alerts required for safe travel.

## **Reliability and Automatic Fallback**

RCS works on most Android devices in the US market, with major carriers including T-Mobile, Verizon, and AT&T supporting RCS messaging. However, not all customers have RCS-capable devices or enabled RCS services.

Signalmas RCS Studio provides automatic SMS fallback for customers whose devices don't support RCS Studio. The platform detects device capabilities automatically before sending messages and delivers content in the best format the device supports, whether that's RCS Studio rich cards, RCS Basic verified text messages, or standard SMS with mobile web links.

Critical travel information requires delivery confirmation. If an RCS message about a gate change fails to deliver within 2 minutes, the system automatically sends an SMS backup. Delivery receipts track message status including sent, delivered, read, and failed, with automatic retry happening through fallback channels for failed messages.

# The Path Forward

## Starting Your RCS Journey

Travel companies beginning RCS implementation should focus on quick wins that demonstrate value and build internal support. Booking confirmations and flight status alerts are ideal starting points because they're simple to implement, provide immediate customer benefit, and generate measurable results.

**In Phase 1:** covering 2-4 weeks, deploy RCS Basic for critical alerts including flight delays, cancellations, gate changes, and baggage delivery updates. Implement booking confirmations through RCS Studio rich cards displaying trip details, calendar integration, and action buttons. Test with a subset of customers before full deployment to establish baseline performance metrics.

In Phase 2: covering 4-8 weeks, expand to mobile check-in workflows through RCS Studio enabling seat selection, baggage confirmation, and passport verification. Implement customer service through verified RCS messaging starting with automated responses for common questions and escalation to live agents for complex issues. Deploy upgrade and ancillary offers through contextual RCS Studio messages.

In Phase 3: covering 8-12 weeks, implement proactive rebooking for delays and cancellations where flights are disrupted and alternative flights are automatically offered through RCS Studio carousels. Deploy personalized travel assistance based on loyalty status, travel history, and preferences. Integrate with airport and hotel operations for location-aware services.

## Building Internal Support

RCS implementation requires buy-in across multiple departments. Demonstrate ROI early and often by calculating call center cost savings from deflected calls, measuring NPS improvements from proactive communication, and tracking ancillary revenue generated through RCS upgrade offers.

Industry benchmarks help build business cases, showing 25-35% call center volume reduction, 3-4x higher conversion on upgrade offers, and 12-18 point NPS increases.

Share customer feedback with skeptical stakeholders. Nothing convinces internal doubters faster than hearing directly from customers about how much they appreciate improved communication. Start executive sponsorship at the VP level for customer experience or digital innovation, demonstrate quick wins, then expand sponsorship to broader executive team.

## Conclusion

The contactless travel experience through RCS isn't futuristic speculation but is happening now in the US market. Airlines, hotels, and travel companies are implementing RCS communication and seeing dramatic improvements in customer satisfaction, operational efficiency, and revenue generation.

Your customers already want this. They want travel information delivered to the devices they carry everywhere, formatted for easy consumption, updated in real time, and responsive to their questions.

RCS delivers what customers want while reducing your operational costs and creating new revenue opportunities. The technology is mature, carrier support is widespread across T-Mobile, Verizon, and AT&T networks, the integration path is clear, and the business case is compelling.

Major US airlines including Delta, United, and American have begun exploring verified messaging and interactive mobile communication. The competitive advantage goes to companies that implement comprehensively and create superior customer experiences rather than treating RCS as just another notification channel.

The travel industry has always been about meeting customers where they are. Today, they're on their phones, in their native messaging apps, expecting communication that works as well as the rest of their digital lives. RCS makes that possible. The question isn't whether travel communication will move to verified, interactive messaging but whether your company will lead this shift or follow competitors who acted sooner.

Signal Mash RCS Studio makes this transition straightforward for travel and hospitality companies. Our platform handles the technical complexity of RCS implementation while providing travel-specific workflows, security protocols, and integration capabilities you need. We work with airlines, hotels, and travel companies to identify high-impact use cases, implement proven communication flows, and measure results that matter.

The future of travel communication is visual, interactive, verified, and built into the messaging apps customers already use every day. Give your travelers the experience they deserve.

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