



FROM BOOTSTRAPS TO BIOMETRICS: INK INNOVATION'S QUEST TO SIMPLIFY TRAVEL

A bold start and resilient DNA

Ink Innovation traces its roots to 2003, when Janet and Shawn Richards launched a web-based departure-control system for Menzies Aviation in the United Kingdom. The founders bootstrapped their fledgling company out of necessity, writing code themselves and using their limited resources to create a world-leading solution in a niche market. Surviving those early years mattered more than rapid growth, and that resilient DNA continues to shape how the company operates today. Rather than chasing investment at any cost, Ink focuses on building products that solve real problems for airlines and airports and on cultivating long-term relationships with customers.

Innovation at speed

The travel-technology landscape moves quickly, with new concepts such as digital identity, blockchain and hybrid airline models emerging every year. Ink Innovation has always prided itself on being ahead of the curve and has recently concentrated on passenger-facing technology. Travellers now expect seamless, self-service journeys; Ink's mission is to make the technology disappear into the background

so that guests hardly notice it. During the pandemic the company pivoted to health tech, digital identity and blockchain software, ensuring that its platform could support digital credentials and contactless processes. Ink's integrated biometric solution demonstrates this focus on frictionless travel. Victor Alzate, the company's chief product officer, notes that the system allows passengers to move through check-in, security and boarding using only their biometrics, eliminating the need to present passports and boarding passes at multiple touchpoints. This technology is already embedded in Ink's ecosystem and underpins the company's ambition to make travel effortless.

Automating the guest experience

When asked what airlines and airports most under-leverage, Ink points to **automation**. Automation is one of the four pillars of the company's forward strategy. By replacing repetitive manual steps with software-driven processes, airlines can reduce operational costs and deliver faster service. The combination of biometric identity, modular ordering and AI-driven recommendation engines will enable guests to manage their journeys in real time without relying on legacy systems.

Building the first digitally native airline

In 2025, Riyadh Air selected Ink Innovation to build the world's first service-delivery platform for a digitally native airline. The partnership aligns with the International Air Transport Association's Modern Airline Retailing model and is designed to put travellers in charge of their journeys. The platform manages orders in real time, allowing passengers to modify their itineraries, add ancillary services and connect with third-party content from hotels or ground transport. Riyadh Air used Ink's system to obtain its Air Operator Certificate, performing proving flights and handling check-in and load-control functions entirely with mobile-based tools. While many carriers plan to launch similar systems from 2027 onwards, Ink and Riyadh Air intend to be fully operational by 2025, underscoring Ink's reputation for moving fast.

Scaling global operations

Ink's technology now supports 58 million passengers annually across 428 airports in 114 countries, handling over 400,000 flights for 184 airlines. Growing organically to this scale has not been without challenges. The biggest bottleneck, according to the founders, is airlines' reluctance to embrace modularity. Large carriers often award end-to-end contracts to just two major suppliers, leaving limited opportunities for innovators. This entrenched behaviour perpetuates a cycle of under-investment in new technology and rewards legacy systems. Ink counters this by demonstrating the cost savings and operational benefits of modular platforms and by partnering with carriers willing to experiment.

From health tech to digital identity

During the pandemic, Ink ventured beyond aviation, developing solutions for health-tech, digital identity and blockchain. Of these verticals, digital identity has proved the most enduring. The company believes that secure digital identities will become central to travel, enabling everything from contactless check-in to personalised offers. Its biometric platform already supports this vision by linking a traveller's face to their verified identity.

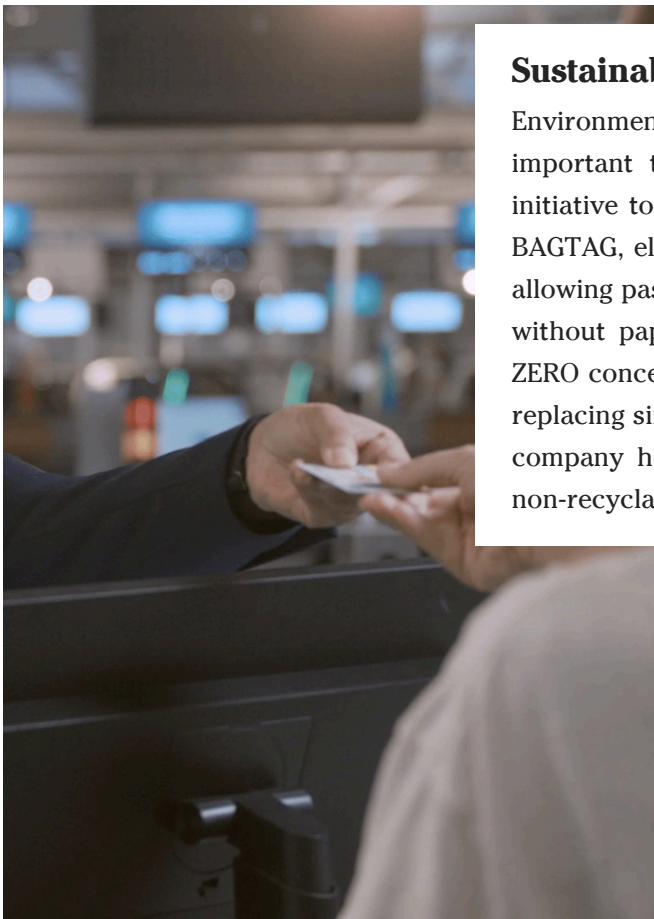


The coming wave of AI and automation

Looking ahead to 2030, industry analysts predict that agentic AI, digital twins and autonomous aircraft will transform aviation. Networks of autonomous systems operating alongside human crews will manage flights in real time, and AI agents will be capable of initiating tasks, interacting with external systems and executing complex workflows without direct human intervention. Digital twins—virtual replicas of aircraft and airport infrastructure updated with live data—are expected to reduce maintenance costs by up to 20%. Although regulatory and investment challenges remain, the momentum towards AI-driven operations underscores the founders' belief that AI and automation will rewrite every repeatable process.

Leading a cross-cultural team

Ink's workforce has grown to over 100 professionals from 18 countries. Managing innovation across time zones requires trust and accountability. The leadership encourages teams to take ownership of their productivity and gives them autonomy to deliver results. While metrics help track progress, motivation and belief in the mission are seen as more powerful drivers. The company's culture emphasises transparency—especially when experiments fail—and resilience in the face of scepticism from those comfortable with legacy systems.



Sustainability and reusable baggage tags

Environmental, social and governance considerations are increasingly important to travellers and investors. Ink's contribution includes an initiative to develop reusable baggage tags. Through a partnership with BAGTAG, electronic bag tags are fully integrated into the Ink ecosystem, allowing passengers to tag their bags at home and move through airports without paper or mobile boarding passes. The system is part of Ink's ZERO concept, which envisions a paperless, touchpoint-light journey. By replacing single-use paper and plastic tags with reusable alternatives, the company hopes to prevent the printing of thousands of kilometres of non-recyclable material.

Building trust through transparent innovation

Ink's leadership acknowledges that true innovation is messy. Experiments will fail, and systems rarely work perfectly on the first attempt. Maintaining trust with partners and customers requires openness about these challenges and a willingness to iterate quickly. The founders emphasise a blend of investment, focus, patience, speed and maturity, along with resilience to push back against the inertia of legacy systems.

Looking ahead

Over the next 12–18 months, Ink Innovation plans to radically change both its direction and approach. Rather than simply supplying commodity systems to airlines, the company intends to partner with carriers and investors to create new revenue streams and transform their businesses. It seeks visionary investors who understand the travel industry and are eager to share in a journey that promises to redefine how people move around the world. By combining a bootstrapped ethos with cutting-edge technology and a relentless focus on the guest experience, Ink is positioning itself to lead the next wave of travel innovation.

Strategic advice for founders and investors

For those building or backing new ventures, Ink's founders offer three pieces of advice:

1. Look beyond buzzwords. When considering AI investments, examine what the technology actually does rather than being impressed by mentions of generative AI. Effective solutions automate processes and deliver tangible improvements.
2. Target step-change innovation. The legacy technology underpinning aviation has been optimised for decades; meaningful gains now require completely new approaches. Invest in companies that aim to reinvent, not merely refine, existing systems.
3. Have conviction. Once founders prove that their technology works, solves a genuine problem, and scales, they must maintain faith in their vision. Process change and automation—augmented by AI—drive the most substantial impact.