

## JetBlue: Delighting Customers and Bringing Humanity Back to Air Travel

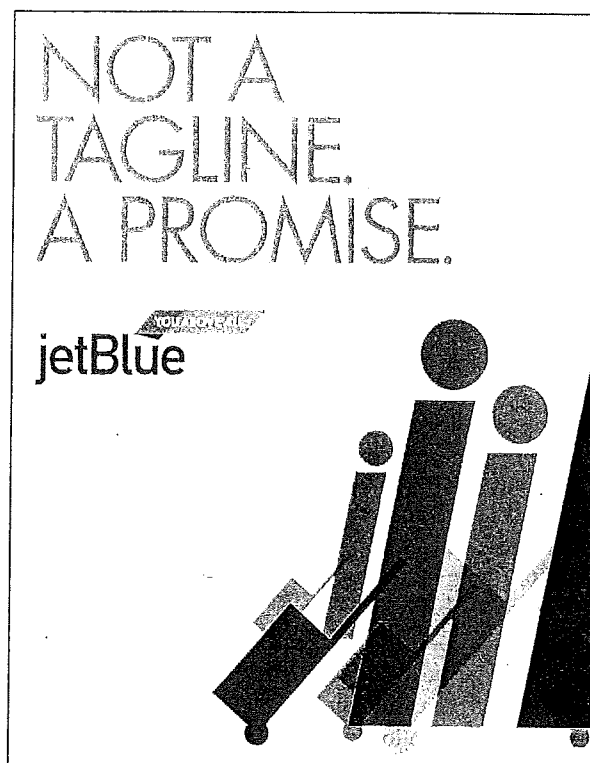
There's an old adage in the airline industry: "You're not flying planes, you're flying people." These days, however, it seems that many big airlines overlook the people factor. Instead, they focus on moving their human cargo as efficiently as possible while charging as much as the traffic will bear. The American Customer Satisfaction Index rates the airline industry near the bottom among 47 industries in customer satisfaction, barely ahead of perennial cellar-dwellers subscription TV and Internet service providers.

Not so at JetBlue Airways. From the very beginning, young JetBlue (little more than 15 years old) has built a reputation for creating first-rate, customer-satisfying experiences. Its slogan—"YOU ABOVE ALL"—tells the JetBlue faithful that they are at the very heart of the company's strategy and culture. JetBlue is on a heartfelt mission to bring humanity back to air travel.

At JetBlue, customer care starts with basic amenities that exceed customer expectations, especially for a low-cost carrier. JetBlue's well-padded, leather-covered coach seats allow three inches more legroom than the average airline seat. Although the airline doesn't serve meals, it offers the best selection of free beverages and snacks to be found at 30,000 feet (including unexpected treats such as Terra Blues chips, Linden's chocolate chip cookies, and Dunkin' Donuts coffee). Every JetBlue seat has its own LCD entertainment system, complete with free 36-channel DirecTV and 100-plus channels of SiriusXM Radio. JetBlue rounds out the amenities with a recently launched industry first—Fly-Fi, an in-flight high-speed Internet service with free basic browsing on all equipped planes.

JetBlue continuously innovates to find new ways to delight customers. Its "Even More Space" seats give customers the option of going from "roomy to roomier," allow early boarding, and give early access to overhead bins. Its "Even More Speed" service provides VIP passage through airport security

screening. And JetBlue's Mint service puts a new spin on first-class air travel, offering front-of-the-plane, lie-flat "sweet seats," some of them in enclosed suites with their own doors. According to JetBlue, Mint services deliver "unexpected,



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JetBlue

individualized 'mo-mints' that revive and engage, keeping you in mint condition during your travels."

Such tangibles help keep JetBlue travelers satisfied. But former JetBlue CEO David Barger knows that the tangibles are only a small part of what really makes JetBlue special. "The hard product—airplanes, leather seats, satellite TVs—as long as you have a checkbook, . . . can be replicated," says Barger. "It's the JetBlue *culture* that can't be replicated. The *human* side of the equation is the most important part of what we're doing." It's that JetBlue culture—the near-obsessive focus on the customer flying experience—that creates not just satisfied JetBlue customers but *delighted* ones.

At JetBlue, developing a customer-centered corporate culture starts with hiring quality people whose personal values match JetBlue's values—from work-at-home part-time call center reservationists to baggage handlers to flight attendants and even pilots. By the time JetBlue employees are on board and trained, they not only *know* the company's core values—safety, integrity, caring, passion, and fun—they *live* them. It's those heartfelt values that result in outstanding customer experiences. And the outstanding customer experiences make JetBlue's customers the most satisfied and loyal in the industry.

Whereas passengers on most competing airlines regard flying as an experience just to be tolerated, many JetBlue customers actually look forward to flying. And customers themselves spread the good word about JetBlue with evangelistic zeal. Recently crowned a "social media all-star" by *Fortune* magazine, JetBlue has been a leader in using a full range of social media to engage customers and get them talking with each other about the brand. And whereas other airlines are just now discovering the power of customer dialogue, throughout its history, in ads and promotions, JetBlue has often let its customers do the talking.

For example, its "Experience JetBlue" Web site features authentic testimonials from some of the airline's most devoted fans, who were found through Twitter and Facebook. The customers give glowing first-person accounts about why they like flying JetBlue. "It's like an open bar for snacks," says one customer. "They're constantly walking around offering it, so I'm never thirsty or hungry." Another JetBlue fan, a 6'3" woman from Portland, Oregon, likes the seating: "I can stretch and sit crosslegged—no black-and-blue knees," she says. "The customer service is above and beyond," declares a third customer, a small business owner from Boston. "[Coach on] JetBlue is very similar to flying first class."

In a former advertising campaign called "Sincerely, JetBlue," actual customers gave voice to even deeper JetBlue experiences. In one ad, for example, customer Melissa confided, "Let me tell you, I wanted not to like you, if only because everyone seems to love you. I got on a flight with a pen and paper, waiting to take down every irritating detail." But, she continued, "two flights later, I was staring at the same blank piece of paper. You've done nothing wrong and everything more than right, if that's possible." After detailing all the right things the airline does, she mock-lamented, "JetBlue,

I wanted not to like you but it can't be done—at all. Sincerely, Melissa, Portland, Oregon."

In other Sincerely, JetBlue ads, customers recounted specific service heroics by dedicated JetBlue employees. For example, customer Ann recounted how, when her JetBlue flight was delayed by a snowstorm, the airline eased the long wait by providing pizza and even a live band. "My [three-year-old] son was dancing. I was dancing," she remembers. "It made a horrible experience really nice." And the Steins from Darien, Connecticut, told how they arrived late at night for a family vacation in Florida with their three very tired small children only to learn that their hotel wouldn't take them in. "Out of nowhere we heard a voice from behind us, go ahead, take my room," the Steins recalled. "A superhero in a JetBlue pilot's uniform, who sacrificed his room graciously, saved our night. And we slept like babies. Thank you, JetBlue."

Delighting customers has been good for JetBlue. Last year, the airline reported record revenues of \$5.8 billion, up 75 percent in just the past five years, with profits soaring more than sixfold. Even during recent hard economic times, as many competing airlines were cutting routes, retiring aircraft, laying off employees, and losing money, JetBlue was adding planes, expanding into new cities, hiring thousands of new employees, and turning profits.

Perhaps even more important to future success, customers continue to adore their JetBlue. For nine straight years, the customer-centered company has topped the J. D. Power and Associates customer satisfaction rankings among major U.S. airlines. For the past five years, JetBlue has flip-flopped with fellow customer-service champ Southwest Airlines for the airline industry's highest customer loyalty scores in the respected Satmetrix Net Promoter rankings. Every year, more than 60 percent of customers have rated JetBlue 9 or 10 on a 0-to-10-point scale indicating the likelihood that they would recommend JetBlue to others.

So, JetBlue really means it when it tells customers YOU ABOVE ALL. "Above all else," says JetBlue's Customer Bill of Rights, "JetBlue Airways is dedicated to bringing humanity back to air travel. We strive to make every part of your experience as simple and as pleasant as possible." Adds JetBlue's senior VP of marketing: "[YOU ABOVE ALL] gets us back to our DNA, to our original mission."

Sources: "Industry Sector Reports: Airlines," Satmetrix, [www.satmetrix.com/expertise/benchmarks-by-industry/travel-and-hospitality/](http://www.satmetrix.com/expertise/benchmarks-by-industry/travel-and-hospitality/), accessed June 2015; Iris Mansour, "Best in Customer Service," *Fortune*, August 29, 2013, <http://money.cnn.com/gallery/technology/2013/08/29/social-media-all-stars.fortune/2.html>; March Gunther, "Nothing Blue about JetBlue," *Fortune*, September 3, 2009, [http://archive.fortune.com/2009/09/03/news/companies/jetblue\\_airways\\_airline.fortune/index.htm](http://archive.fortune.com/2009/09/03/news/companies/jetblue_airways_airline.fortune/index.htm); Kevin Randall, "Red, Hot, and Blue: The Hottest American Brand Is Not Apple," *Fast Company*, June 3, 2010, [www.fastcompany.com/1656066/red-hot-and-blue-hottest-american-brand-not-apple](http://www.fastcompany.com/1656066/red-hot-and-blue-hottest-american-brand-not-apple); Rupal Parekh, "The Newest Marketing Buzzword? Human," *Advertising Age*, September 20, 2013, <http://adage.com/print/244261/>; "The American Customer Satisfaction Index: Benchmarks by Industry," [www.theacsi.org/customer-satisfaction-benchmarks/benchmarks-by-industry](http://www.theacsi.org/customer-satisfaction-benchmarks/benchmarks-by-industry), accessed September 2015; and <http://experience.jetblue.com/>, investor.jetblue.com; and [www.jetblue.com/about/](http://www.jetblue.com/about/), accessed September 2015.