

jetBlue

1. In order to enhance its image, how could jetBlue have better communicated with its internal stakeholders across the country on Valentine's Day and during the days that followed?

Prior to the February 14, 2007 communication meltdown, jetBlue had significant time to prepare for any and all communications contingencies by utilizing a variety of communications channels in order to shore-up any gaps in managing internal communications. For example, in the aftermath of this situation when jetBlue customers were unable to contact the airline's reservation line, jetBlue had ample time beforehand to envision – and provision for - a worst-case IT scenario. jetBlue would have benefited from backup/emergency IT support at the data center to aid the ticketing and reservation system. This includes allowing for additional “virtual” personnel to come online via VPN (virtual private networks) from remote locations to support the system. Although there are costs associated with provisioning stand-by IT resources, this is a fraction of the cost associated with jetBlue's image recovery efforts.

Additionally, jetBlue didn't take advantage of the ability to send messages PIN-to-PIN from SmartPhones such as the Blackberry. Plane and flight crews wanted to help, but were scattered all over the country and didn't know what was going on or where to go. Updates could have been PIN-to-PIN “messed” to jetBlue folks over SmartPhones. Blackberry has had this feature for some time and it's likely that many on jetBlue's staff had Blackberrys. This emergency measure works well with or without IT infrastructure as this service is associated with the service provider (like Verizon or T-Mobile) rather than dependent on corporate infrastructure. Stabilizing internal communications is key to any disaster recovery process.

2. Should the corporate communications team at jetBlue have arranged for CEO David Neeleman to appear on the national television news and the talk show circuit following the crisis? What might be the potential benefits and risks to the company's reputation?

Yes, visiting talk shows and giving face time would have improved the company's image and would have given personality and humanity to the issue. Fortunately, Neeleman has a great personality (not true for all CEOs), is good in face-to-face communications and in answering tough questions. This kind of visibility shows that Neeleman is not just another CEO out to make a quick dollar,

but that he is concerned about this issue, about the company and wants to do the right thing. Hence his “Talk is cheap. Watch us”¹ approach.

However, this is a double-edged sword, as not all CEOs on the talk show circuit are like Neeleman and may not be good at answering tough questions and/or may ultimately become the brunt of jokes based on their verbal faux pas. The talk show opportunities could have backfired on jetBlue. Bad examples of this are infamous “speechisms” by GW Bush and Dan Quayle.

3. What kind of corporate advertising program would you recommend for jetBlue?

There weren't too many happy folks during those few days in February 2007. In order to turn that negativity around, instead of taking an “I'm sorry”/apologetic approach, I'd recommend launching a positive approach about what jetBlue DOES offer, rather than dwelling on jetBlue's recent shortcomings. I would capitalize on this approach by initiating a *Smile* advertising program and campaign to boost the brand. This would include reaching out to current/past customers of jetBlue by sending a personalized letter, offering incentives or discounts and outlining the airline's “first class” amenities that all customers receive, such as:

- § Plush leather seats and the most room in coach than any other airline
- § Tasty snacks and beverages like Dunkin' Donuts coffee and Terra Blue Chips
- § Shut-Eye Service, featuring the Bliss Spa courtesy kit
- § 36 channels of live TV or First-run movies from Fox InFlight Entertainment, plus 100 channels of XM Satellite radio free at every seat
- § Offer a 5% discount on any jetBlue airline ticket purchased within a specified period of time (seasonal ticketing) and enclose a coupon for a free Dunkin' Donuts coffee to enjoy now

Additionally, in this [sales] letter, reiterate that jetBlue was the first airline to champion a customer bill of rights.

Further, to boost the *Smile* campaign – internally – provide smiley face buttons to all employees (contingent upon whether someone owns smiley face icon or if it's public domain; would need to research this opportunity) and create a brand identity around this campaign. Set-up a twitter account for the *jetBlue Smile Campaign* and encourage jetBlue personnel to “tweet” about the good things jetBlue has to offer and/or how jetBlue has helped to make a customer happy and what they did to provide excellent customer service. Overall, this approach would help to bring jetBlue back as an airline carrier of choice.

¹ Efthimiou, Gregory G. "jetBlue Airways: Regaining Altitude." Arthur W. Page Society's annual Case Study Competition Journal (2008): 99-104.

4. If implemented, how would you market the jetBlue Airways Customer Bill of Rights to external and internal stakeholders? How would this affect jetBlue's reputation?

“Our Company...Our Customer Promise” - Neeleman has always been specific about jetBlue's clientele – they are customers, not merely passengers. In order for jetBlue to continue with this approach, I would ensure this message is:

- § Solidified during new employee training/orientation programs
- § Key points to the Customer Bill of Rights is posted on the jetBlue website as well as at all airline ticket counters
- § Include verbiage during training as well as where Bill of Rights are posted that jetBlue was the first airline to champion the Customer Bill of Rights.
- § Solicit feedback about these marketing efforts from both external and internal stakeholders by setting up a survey/link on the company's website
- § Learn, grow, modify procedures from this process/feedback

There was a turning point in this situation that could have saved jetBlue millions of dollars. As a result, admittedly, in one interview with TODAY show host, Matt Lauer, Neeleman says, “It [miscommunication, breakdown of services] was probably an over-reaction, and in hindsight we probably didn't need to go that far...” And further; “For jetBlue, getting back to normal could take some time. Lauer noted that the company's failure to deliver because of just one storm may have threatened the company's position in the highly competitive discount airline travel business.”² jetBlue gambled with Mother Nature and lost. Although jetBlue is making progress in recovering their once sterling image, now tarnished, this is a hard lesson to learn and will be a continuing process for jetBlue.

² Springer, John. jetBlue paying millions to stranded flyers 7 March 2007. TODAY. 4 March 2007 <<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/17237390/>>.