

Twitter Helps Resolve Travelers' Complaints Faster

Recently Keith Pape, the ad agency executive from Los Angeles, found himself in a bad mood as gate agents of American Airlines coldly stopped him. He wanted to leave Austin, Texas, on a fast flight and reported early in order to fly standby on an earlier flight. He was told that the ticket purchased by him does not entitle him to be included in the standby list for the Dallas–Fort Worth. He was asked to wait but he, just as many other travelers do these days when waiting for flights, logged into his Twitter account for expressing his frustration.



In exactly six minutes' time, one of the staff members responsible for managing the busy Twitter account of American Airlines directly contacted Pape and explained that it is difficult to permit free standby on most fares. The staff member added that the airlines would be glad to look at his ticket and the deal, if he would be interested in following American Airlines and message his details directly.

Pape replied in the positive for this request and noted that his standby request has not been turned down by any of the other airlines so far. The staff apologized profusely and in about half-an-hour's time a visibly happy Pape found himself seated in an outbound flight and was vehemently defending the American Airlines against the complaints that his followers Tweeted.



Pape is not the only one to go through such an experience and customers unhappy because of airline representatives who are unhelpful or the long waiting time on customer service phones are realizing that it is more effective to convey their grievances through Twitter, a panic button that is easily accessible these days.

Twitter works faster and you might even get your complaint sorted out (depends on the airline) because you can tweet in much less time than it takes to get a customer service staff on the telephone and register your complaint. According to SimpliFlying, a consulting firm in the aviation industry, about 213 airlines are on Twitter and have millions of followers. These airlines have found out that quick action on

complaints pays.

SimpliFlying's research shows that having a Twitter and using it are different. About 80 percent of the Twitter content is generated by just 24 airlines, indicating that others are not competitive enough. According to Unmetric, a social media research firm, American Airlines tops the list with an average reply time (ART) of 15 minutes. On the social media front, other airlines are catching up as they realize that it is important to manage their reputation and that small issues can spiral out of control.



A classic example is the incident of 2010 in which director Kevin Smith was involved. He declared war with Southwest on Twitter over their policy related to size of customers. Kevin Smith was denied a seat because he did not fit into one seat. His followers on Twitter rallied behind him in his fight. What was impressive was the speed at which the issue was resolved.

Keep your smartphone or laptop ready even at the airport!

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