

# Wizz Air's Reputation

Max Vorster, January 25, 2024

**F**OUNDED in Hungary in 2003, Wizz Air is an ultra-low-cost airline. Though listed on the London Stock Exchange in 2015, its first flights to the UK were in 2017, making it a relatively new competitor for British consumers. It serves mainly Europe with its 177-aircraft-strong fleet of mostly the state-of-the-art Airbus A321neo with orders for 369 more aircraft. Wizz Air has experienced large growth in recent years, flying 45.7 million customers in 2022, six million higher than pre-pandemic levels in 2019, and double that of 2016. 2023 looks even stronger, with Q1 having a year-on-year increase in passenger numbers of 80%.<sup>1</sup>

However, according to a *Which?* survey of 8000 UK consumers on value for money, customer service, and boarding experience, Wizz Air was found to be the worst airline, driven by its abysmal 48% customer service score.

## Why Wizz Air?

Wizz Air's reputational challenges are interesting. They have only been in the UK for five years, so are still in the process of entrenching a reputation - I, personally, had never heard of them until last year. The result of this is that many consumers may see low prices and an unrecognised brand and, as I did, assume they are a budget version of Ryanair.

This is the second reason that they are an interesting study: Ryanair is a direct comparison. Both compete for the cheapest no-frills routes. Having flown on both, I found Wizz Air the more comfortable flight, inverse to my original assumption. This signifies to me that Wizz Air is struggling to reach potential flyers and establishing a reputation as an equal to Ryanair.

Given that Wizz Air makes a loss (€465.3 million in 2022), my recommendations will seek to be cost effective. Additionally, the single-class flight system means that those it attracts are a mostly homogeneous population, though being a publicly traded company means shareholders must be considered. This latter group, though, will mostly care about the company's financials, which would improve alongside their reputation.

## I MEDIA COVERAGE

Media coverage on Wizz Air is either corporate articles - announcements of new destinations, financial reports, etc. - or customer experience horror stories. To give an example, *one man sent bailiffs* to Luton Airport to collect £4,500 owed to him by Wizz Air over cancelled flights.

There is a news section on their website, though it is difficult to find. Articles are standard press releases and performs little outreach, though this is standard for airline companies, with Wizz Air's news section being easier to find than most. It is futile to seek customer outreach through [wizzair.com](https://www.wizzair.com) given a low readership base and an audience who will only *maybe* engage for a couple of days each year when seeking a holiday.

## Twitter

[@wizzair](https://twitter.com/wizzair) can only be described as corporate, activity being press releases and customer replies to aggrieved Twitter users. Their follower count of 66.6k is tiny. Compare this



with [@Ryanair](https://twitter.com/Ryanair)'s 711k and [@easyJet](https://twitter.com/easyJet)'s 577k<sup>2</sup> and the need for improvement is obvious. easyJet and Ryanair's success derives from their accounts' fun - they interact with other users for more than customer service, making funny or interesting tweets. For example, a recent *Daily Star* article declared that [@Ryanair](https://twitter.com/Ryanair) had 'won the internet' after trolling Liverpool fans. Anybody in online spaces revolving around football, F1, or numerous other sports will consistently see Ryanair's tweets being shared. Ryanair also has a TikTok account with 2 million followers, Wizz Air does not have one - an obvious oversight.

Wizz Air's hot pink branding and WordArt-esque logo imply that it is trying to be seen as a fun brand, rather than a 'serious' airline à la British Airways, so its corporate outreach should reflect this. Fun social media accounts can help to establish Wizz Air as a friendly, familiar brand like Jet2, and subconsciously change attitudes towards it. Doing well enough could even lead to positive news articles like the *Daily Star* one to counteract negative articles.

## II CUSTOMER SERVICE

Wizz Air's customer service is the area most in need of overhaul. Wizz's poor reputation is driven by their poor customer service, with the Civil Aviation Authority finding that in 2022,

<sup>2</sup>easyJet's passenger count is roughly the same as Wizz Air's.

## QUICK FACTS

<b>Founded</b>	2003, Hungary
<b>Flights 2022</b>	167,709
<b>Passengers 2022</b>	45.7 million
<b>Revenue passengers kms</b>	43.7 billion
<b>CO<sub>2</sub>/passenger/km</b>	55.8g
<b>Fleet size</b>	177; 369 ordered
<b>Average aircraft age</b>	5.8 years
<b>Revenue 2022 (euros)</b>	1,663.4 million
<b>Profit 2022 (euros)</b>	-465.3 million
<b>Share price (WIZZ)</b>	2,674.54p
<b>year-on-year</b>	-240.46p / -8.25%
<b>year-to-date</b>	+775.54p / +40.91%

<sup>1</sup>Calculated using data from [wizzair.com/en-gb/information-and-services/investor-relations/investors/traffic-statistics](https://www.wizzair.com/en-gb/information-and-services/investor-relations/investors/traffic-statistics)

Wizz Air passengers were the most likely to make escalated complaints. Given Wizz Air and Ryanair's similar prices and similar flight experience, Wizz Air simply needs to be *slightly* better than Ryanair to see a large increase in demand.

While considering how this could be done, I decided to make a Wizz Air account. After inputting my email, I was returned with the message 'The e-mail is not valid'. Different emails all gave the same message. About to give up, I retried the first which, somehow, was suddenly acceptable.<sup>3</sup> For the website to fall on the *very first hurdle* reinforces Wizz Air's negative stereotype, making every subsequent inconvenience a blacker mark than it should be to a customer. This, then, is the solution: to fix as many bugs with the website as possible, such as the one which meant **passengers could not check in** and were forced to pay to do it in person at the airport, one which Wizz Air refused to refund. A smooth booking experience will help ingratiate Wizz Air with passengers, making it so that other minor hiccups do less damage. After all, how many potential passengers have given up at that original email glitch and instead flown with Ryanair?

### Reimbursement

Secondly, as with the example of the check-in debacle, claiming compensation is too difficult. Wizz' bad press is overwhelmingly related to people being stalled or mishandled by customer services. That Civil Aviation Authority report also showed that Wizz Air was deliberately delaying repayment to customers, a bad mark against their name. Poor customer services combined Wizz Air flights being **the most delayed of any airline** means that many, many customers are having bad experiences. Without the ability to see an in-depth report into the airline's financials and customer demand reports I can only speculate, but it seems unlikely that more money by refusing to refund customers than is lost to potential customers otherwise put off by Wizz's shoddy reputation. I would certainly doubt that those customers forced to pay extra as a result of the website glitch are ever flying Wizz Air again.

### III HIGHLIGHTING POSITIVES

As well as eliminating reputational challenges, we must consider reputational boons. When flying with a budget airline, one envisages rusty hand-me-downs, barely fit to fly. Wizz Air, however, has the youngest fleet of any major airline, with an average age of 5.8 years. Airbus' new A321neo is the workhorse of the fleet. Advertising by Wizz Air should reflect this modernity, and hence safety.

### Environmentalism

The side-effect of the fleet's modernity is that Wizz has the lowest environmental footprint per passenger per kilometre of any major airline, at 55.8 grams of carbon dioxide per passenger per kilometre. This is a remarkably low number, given that British Airways is only *targeting* 88.3g for 2025, while easyJet reported 81.1g in 2021. Wizz Air advertising should be reflecting this, whereas it currently does not.<sup>4</sup> Guilty-feeling travellers may be attracted who want to minimise their impact without giving up flight. Running special green liveries on some aeroplanes would be another great way to get customers talking, given their visibility at an airport or even in the sky above. This would be cost effective, given no need to purchase advertising space.

This would, however, open Wizz Air to criticisms of corporate greenwashing. Wizz Air may be *comparatively* eco-friendly, flight remains an inherently non-eco-friendly means of travel, so advertising greenness could be construed as mis-leading and hypocritical. To offset this, Wizz Air must pursue some strategy to minimise their environmental footprint.

Currently, there is a section on [wizzair.com](https://wizzair.com) to donate to offset your flight's emissions. This is good, but could be improved by putting a prompt to donate while purchasing your flight, automatically calculating the cost of the offset for the route you book. This acts as a nudge for customers, making it more likely that they donate. A, say, £3 donation when viewed *alongside* a £30 ticket will seem smaller to a customer than a £3 donation made *after* buying a £30 ticket, and thus is more likely to be made. A strategy which would incur some, albeit minimal, cost would be to offer to match one-for-one any donation made. This would more than double the money being donated (a £3 donation is more likely to be made when you know it is actually a £6 donation), and make customers believe that Wizz Air is working to minimise its environmental impact.

The third, more expensive, environmental strategy would be to pledge to donate a certain amount per flight. Using data from their **2022 Annual Report**, I calculated that 56 trees planted per flight would offset all 2022 carbon emissions over a period of 10 years:<sup>5</sup> this amounts to 9.3 million trees. Various charities offer a sum of \$1 per tree: thus, this would be a large, albeit not bank-breaking, cost. A partnership could be made with one of these charities to build Wizz Air as a green brand and eliminate accusations of greenwashing.

### IV CONCLUSION

The easiest way for Wizz Air to improve their reputation would be to overhaul their Twitter, and other social media, accounts, so make them entities that members of the public enjoy interacting with. TikTok and Twitter are the platforms most likely to reach users, so should be prioritised. Additionally, simply fixing the bugs on their website would go a long way to improving customer experience.

To truly overhaul their reputation, a serious investment in better customer services must be made. Refunds should not be withheld, and customer should have their complaints settled quickly and not feel they are being ignored.

Finally, Wizz Air could work to gain an eco-friendly reputation, becoming the airline of choice for the casual environmentalist. To not seem hypocritical, though, this would require heavier investment than the firm is likely to wish for.

To close, though, the question must be pondered as to whether Wizz Air is even interested in their reputational improvement. Yes, it may improve potential passenger numbers, yet flights are already 78% full with aircraft being utilised for 3.2 flights each day. More demand as a result of a better reputation may not actually be able to be fully utilised. The amount ticket prices could be raised as a result of rising reputation-driven demand is likely minimal, given fine margins of price competition with Ryanair. No harm can come of pursuing my minimal-cost reputational strategies, but the costlier ones are likely unnecessary.

<sup>3</sup>I duplicated this bug on another computer on another browser.

<sup>4</sup>Upon loading the app, 'Fly the Greenest' does flash up. I only noticed it when I was looking out for it, which typifies the problem.

<sup>5</sup>Assuming an emissions rate of 55.8g/passenger/km, and that a tree can eliminate 25kg of CO<sub>2</sub> per year.