

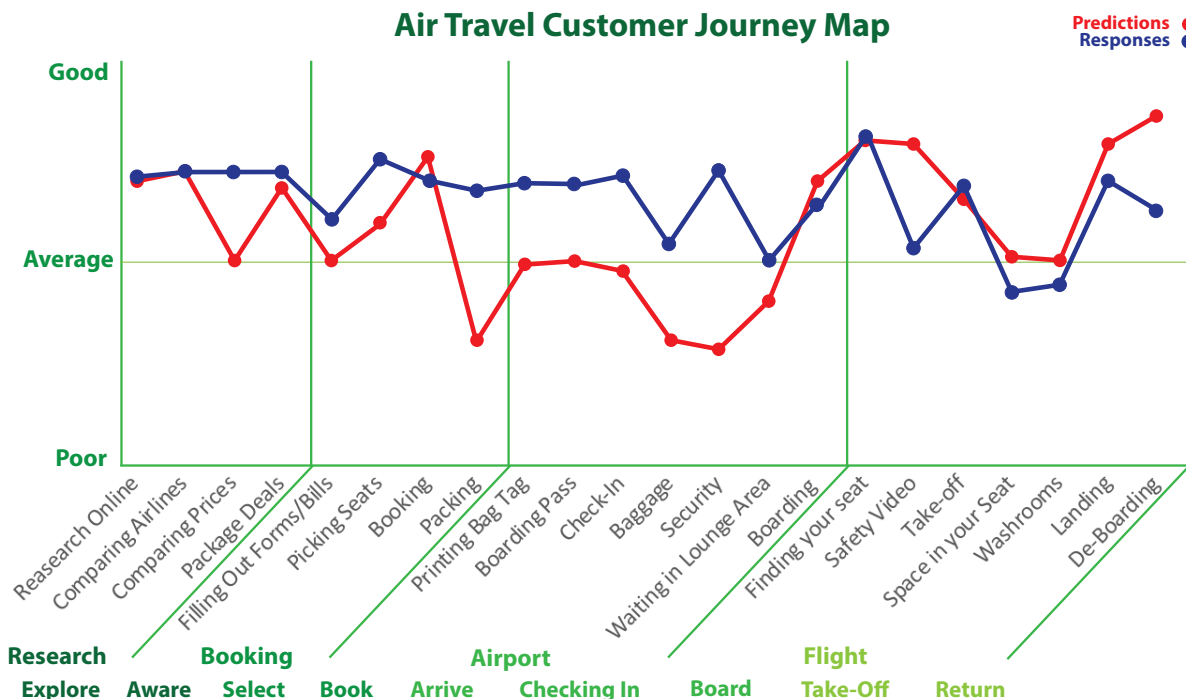
Turbulence: Customers' Bumpy Experience with Air Travel

My first time in an airplane was at the Canadian National Exhibition when I was six years old. They let us sit and explore the aircraft while teaching us about the mechanics behind the plane. Now I didn't actually fly in a plane until I was 16 years old when I went to Prince Edward Island without my parents. Going through my first airport alone really threw me under the bus. I was lost, confused, and mildly scared that I packed something I couldn't bring. But all of that fear disappeared as soon as I was through baggage, security and all the other checkpoints.

Reflecting back on this and my following trip to the Dominican Republic in 2017 (also without my parents), my airport experiences have been extremely positive. Even though I am very good with directions and I have a lot of patience, I could still see why some people get frustrated with the experience. Long wait times, lots of miscommunication, lost baggage, space on flights, and getting lost all contribute to their negative experiences.

Customer Journey Map

I have been on planes before and I've had a relatively positive experience every time. This is good for me, but not so much for finding out the true customer experience of air travel. That is why I made a CJM to find out what people really think of air travel – and the answers are quite different than what I expected! I created a survey to collect data from other air travellers to see how they felt about the air travel experience.



The red line illustrates what I expect this interaction to be; average, great or poor. My predictions were that the 'Research' and 'Booking' sections to be somewhat average, and potentially a bit above if they say, found a good deal. There is a sharp drop from 'booking' (the

ticket) to 'packing' because I predicted that packing is everyone's least favourite part of going on vacation. The real responses showed that people were not really affected by the different tasks – especially with packing. My experience with this was average - I had help each time I did it. My friend's father bought the tickets online for my first trip and I used a third party to book my second trip. This resulted in a smooth experience and gave me no issues.

The following section of 'Airport' I predicted to be a poor to average experience. I placed my red line quite low because of peoples' impatient nature and inability to navigate through new tech (self-serve kiosks). To my surprise, my survey revealed that people have a lot more patience than I first thought because their average rating for the airport experience was 6.4 when my prediction was 4.4. These results revealed that self-serve kiosk sections (bag tag, boarding pass, check-in) were easier for people to figure out - unlike my experience. I found that part of travel to be the hardest, but it may be because I was new to travelling. The 'baggage' and 'waiting' points reflected what I thought negative experiences would be. It is in these sections where I would score a good experience because I do not mind waiting in line.

The final section of 'Flight', both red and blue lines are virtually the same - minus the safety video point. I overestimated the interaction while most people thought the interaction was just average. Survey takers could have thought the safety video was redundant because they have seen it so many times before, resulting in a drastically lower score than the red line. Personally, I have not flown enough to feel comfortable without the safety video but in the future, I may also feel like that information may be redundant. The de-boarding section is also a lot lower than the predictions, I thought that it was going to be extremely positive because they are finally off the plane (like I was) but survey takers probably hated the experience of leaving and all the crowds.

My experience with air travel and its positivity can be attributed to my high tolerance to waiting. This gives me an advantage when having to stand in lines, sit in lounge areas, and de-board planes - which seemed to be problem areas for survey takers. Overall, I find the data collected from this customer journey map to be an important insight into how the air travel process works.

The 5 Main Pieces that Make Up Air Travel

1. The people

Customers who make up air travel can be divided into two categories; ones travelling for business or ones travelling casually. The employees you encounter in the process are many. They include online support customer service (call, chat or email), check-in staff, security, pilot, flight attendant and general customer service staff. The staff either makes or breaks the customers' experience. We can see the result of poor customer service in the recent events of planes overbooking their flights.

I personally have never had a negative experience with the staff, but that could be because I never put forward a negative energy. I feel that staff and others reciprocate the mood you are displaying and react to that accordingly, which can make or break your interaction. I was polite to the flight attendant on the plane and that got me a free drink. It can be worth your while to be nice sometimes!

2. Interactions

It is impossible to go through the process of air travel without having multiple interactions. They begin as soon as you step foot in the airport (or earlier if you use an online booker or travel agencies). The interactions take place at baggage, customs, security, with the ticket taker, the flight attendant, the PA system, during the safety video and many more. These interactions, like the individual people, make up customers' experiences when travelling. Having a negative experience at any of these points can change the customer's opinion and create a negative reaction that can negatively affect the airlines.

My first time at customs in the Dominican Republic was a typical airport interaction I believe. The man behind the glass was straightforward, fast, and efficient. I was polite and so was he, but it never got personal. This made the exchange fast, so I could get on with my trip and him with his job.

3. Channels

You can access air travel across all platforms. Online ticket booking has become more popular than the traditional travel agent booking over the phone or in person, but both remain present today. Some people still choose to book directly at the airport, but these are generally last-minute flights for re-booking or cancelled flights.

I personally have only had experience booking online, but my extended family tends to go the travel agent route which involves phone, email, and the occasional in-person meeting. I find online to be the most effective and efficient in terms of getting what you want when you want it. When I booked online the experience was fast and straightforward resulting in an easy transaction.

4. Touch Points

Air travel uses multiple touchpoints that allow for a fully immersive and comprehensive experience. It normally starts with online interaction when booking – this requires an email. A phone can also be used here if travel agencies are in place or you had trouble with online booking. The most prominent touch point is at the airport which involves many face to face interactions. With my experience, I prefer to have face to face interactions in situations like this because it allows me to find all the information I need efficiently and accurately.

The uprising of self-serve kiosks has taken over modern airports, such as Pearson International. This mode of connection gives the user full control and makes the experience fast – if you know how to work it. My first time using the machines was hard. The buttons didn't make sense and I kept getting error messages. I ended up calling over the worker to assist me and it all worked out fine. I feel that in the future these methods of self-serve will dominate airport experiences, but until then, people will still struggle without more help.

5. Perks

Incentives are a huge part of air travel, and it can help customers decide which airline or airport to use for their travels. One incentive is the availability of package deals. Airlines often pair up with hotels to give a combo deal for air travel and accommodation for better rates. This is mutually beneficial because it gives both companies business and gives the customer the best deal possible.

Another incentive is the use of reward points. This can come from solo loyalty cards (Air Miles) or credit card loyalty programs (BMO air miles, American Express air miles, etc.). Since these rewards programs take very little effort on behalf of the customer, it is easy for them to use daily. This results in more air travel, and sometimes more air travel with specific companies depending on their own incentives.

Personally, I have never used any kind of incentive program when flying, but my extended family does. Since they travel once or twice a year it works out beneficially for them to collect points and redeem them when travelling.

The Gap

Breaking down the gap between customers and the air travel industry is a huge topic in recent media. With the ease of access to cell phones, customers are capturing all of their negative experiences and sharing their opinion on social media in real time. The countless number of negative videos surfacing of airlines not helping individuals with lost baggage and kicking passengers off flights because of overbooking, or racial-profiling. These negative actions cause the airlines to do damage control almost daily which means they are spending a lot of money in preventable cases.



Delta Passenger Kicked Off Plane for Using Bathroom: 'I Had an Emergency'
1,029,485 views 13K 436 SHARE



This Technicality Got Family With Infant Kicked Off Overbooked Delta Flight
3,322,768 views 36K 1K SHARE

While not having the first-hand experience of these events, I do think these are important issues that need to be addressed by these companies. A lot of these issues stem from miscommunication and the preconceived ideas/biases of one individual reflected on another (employee to passenger or vice versa). These types of issues are preventable if individuals are trained properly to handle situations and companies update their policies and standards.

Improvements

Problem: No communication or miscommunication.

Solution: Improve policies and standards.

Miscommunication is one of the biggest issues facing airlines right now. I have seen this first hand when the airline forgot to tell my aunt that they had changed her flight time. If she had not checked online prior to the flight, she would have arrived over 5 hours early. Issues like this can be easily preventable if companies were more transparent in what they are doing.

Letting customers know when changes have been made to their flights, giving them directions in an airport, or helping them solve a problem can make all the difference. That is why in order to fix the issues at hand, airlines need to put in place new policies that give customers more insight and information about their trips. Keeping customers in the know will build a stronger relationship and bond between the companies resulting in better customer experiences.

Problem: Lost Baggage.

Solution: Implementing option to have a GPS tracker in your bag.

Lost baggage is a huge frustration for many travellers. Losing your bag can mean losing a lot of money and sentimental items. A way to improve this experience can be to give the option for passengers to purchase a rental GPS tracker that will hook onto the bag, tracking it as it travels through the baggage collection, to boarding the plane, to de-boarding, and to the baggage claim. This will prevent missing bags as users can easily find where the bag is in the airports.

A level of security measures will be in place to ensure the device cannot be removed by a passenger. There will be a designated area with staff who apply and remove the tag ensuring there is no tampering with the product. I would find this service beneficial as it can protect my personal belongings and I feel others will think the same way. An option to use 'air miles' or a points system to pay for this service will also be an option.

Problem: Confusing Self-Serve Kiosks.

Solution: Video tutorials online.

Having first-hand experience with tricky kiosks I feel like this problem is present at most advanced airports. Many first time, young, old flyers and everyone else in between have trouble using the machines. Error messages flash across the screen so often that it may not be as efficient as you think. However, the ratio of familiar kiosk users to new kiosk users is much higher meaning that they are better in the long run.

My suggestion to solve this problem is for airlines to create video tutorials that teach flyers how to use the machines. These videos can be shared through email, when you get the confirmation that your flight is booked, on the website, and even an option to watch the video before using the kiosk. Teaching flyers how to use the machines even before they step into an airport will create a faster, smoother experience for all parties involved.

Overall Experience

I find that with air travel, I would not complain about anything. With a service like this, you have to expect certain things whether you like it or not. That means you will have to wait in a long line for an extended period of time and that you will have to problem solve if it comes to it. I can handle these situations, they are not the be-all-end-all for my trips.

These experiences vary trip by trip and affect individuals differently based on their mood that day. This results in an unpredictable environment that gives passengers and employees a different experience every time they work or travel. Air travel is not predictable, and individuals who believe it should be will have a hard time with the experience.