

Starting up

- Have you ever lost something in the street, or left something on public transport or on a plane?
Did you get it back? Recount your experience.
- Read through the whole article. Then do the exercise below.

Reading 1

Read the article again to find these things and people. (Some are not mentioned. For these, put 'NM'.)

- a) the item that the writer had lost
- b) the title of one of the books on it
- c) the titles of other books on it
- d) the sender of the first message he received in relation to losing it
- e) the sender of the second message he received
- f) the second organisation that he contacted about it
- g) the organisation that eventually returned it
- h) the two companies that deal with lost property at Heathrow
- i) the name of an executive at one of these companies
- j) the name of an executive at the other company
- k) four things that people leave or have left on planes

Frequent flyer: navigating the lost property maze

It was on the train home from Heathrow that I had a panicked thought. I zipped open my suitcase and foraged around. I had left my Kindle on flight BA 108 from Dubai. I was furious with myself, but thought I would get it back. My Kindle was not the latest model, it had a worn black cover and whoever found it would have found my downloads heavy going, apart from *Hello Dubai: Skiing, Sand and Shopping in the World's Weirdest City*. Back home, I logged on to the Heathrow lost-property website, registered and received an email saying that, while the lost property office aimed to reply within 48 hours, "we are currently exceptionally busy and it may take up to seven days". They begged me to "be patient", but I wasn't because Amazon Kindle Support alerted me that Heathrow lost property had tried to communicate with my Kindle via email, which persuaded me that they must have found it.

There was, in retrospect, no logic to this: lost property's email was in fact simply the result of my registration — it might have been trying to penetrate my Kindle still snug in the seat pocket of BA 108, or in the home of whoever was now immersed in *Hello Dubai*. However, spurred on, I resubmitted my details, received another "be patient" response and, a few days later, persuaded British Airways to give me lost property's number. The person who answered denied all knowledge of my Kindle. I explained that Heathrow lost property had been trying to email my ereader. She asked for my email address, said "We're in business" and went to retrieve my Kindle from the warehouse. There was a £38.36 administration fee and courier charge, a tax, I concluded, on my stupidity.

After its return, I received two more emails from Heathrow asking if it could help me find my Kindle, so I set out to investigate the world of lost goods and the not very joined-up process of getting them back. There are two layers of Heathrow outsourcing — a company called Bagport, which I had been speaking to and emailing, and an outfit called MissingX. Nick Ellenden, co-head of MissingX in the UK, told me that flyers mostly do what I did — leave their electronic devices on the plane. Ellenden told me he was always surprised by people who left crutches on the plane and, once, a prosthetic leg. Children's favourite toys are a challenge because they often misremember where they left them.

Bagport told me that its contract prevented it from commenting on my dealings with them and that I should talk to Heathrow. Heathrow told me it was sorry my experience "fell short of the service we aim to provide . . . We are working with our partners to ensure this doesn't happen again." I'm sure readers of this column are, unlike me, smart enough to check the seat pockets, but if you do slip up, please let me know how you get on.



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