

Customer Service (5/5/17)

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Southwest Airlines: A Case Study in Great Customer Service

BY MEGAN WEBB-MORGAN

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In addition to its commercial and financial success, Southwest Airlines also takes the #10 place on the 2012 Customer Service Hall of...

Southwest Airlines serves 10.8 million passengers a month, provides service to 42 states, and hasn't seen a red balance sheet since the Nixon presidency.

In addition to its commercial and financial success, Southwest Airlines also takes the #10 place on the [2012 Customer Service Hall of Fame](#). To put that in perspective: the next airline on the list, United Airlines, holds spot #82.

How does Southwest manage to be so successful both as a company and a customer service provider?

Related: [Improve your customer service with an inbound call center](#)

Great Customer Service Starts With Happy Employees

Southwest treats its employees well -- by backing the decisions of individual employees as well as providing everyone with quality benefits.

Despite the fact that the US doesn't mandate paid maternity leave -- and, in fact, only 16% of employers offer it -- Southwest provides new parents with 12 weeks of paid leave.

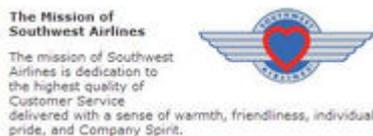
In [BrightScope](#)'s recent report of the 30 highest-rated 401(k) plans, Southwest Airlines topped the chart by matching 100% of what its pilots set aside for their retirement: up to 9.3% of their income. In 2011, Southwest contributed almost \$94 million -- or an average of 3.2% of each eligible employee's compensation -- to the retirement accounts of its employees.

Your business: What makes your employees happy? Making employees brand advocates is your best defense against bad customer service.

Related: Choose a 401k plan your employees will love

It's Part of the Mission

According to their website, "The mission of Southwest Airlines is dedication to the highest quality of Customer Service delivered with a sense of warmth, friendliness, individual pride, and Company Spirit." By dedicating their company decisions to fulfilling that mission, Southwest's customer service ratings earned a 33.9% "Excellent" rating and only 3.3% "Poor."



In comparison to the other airlines on the list:

- At #82 on the list, United earned 19.7% "Excellent" versus 5.1% "Poor."
- At #84, American Airlines earned 18.9% "Excellent" and 6.4% "Poor."
- At #90, Delta earned 17.7% "Excellent" and 10.2% "Poor."
- At #100, US Airways earned 13.6% "Excellent" and 7.5% "Poor."

Of particular note: only Southwest has a mission statement posted prominently on their website.

Your business: How do you stack up against your competitors? Find what you do best and leverage that for all your customers to see.

Related: [90% of Online Customers Trust Recommendations: Are You Using Testimonials?](#)

Impeccable Customer Service and Customer Experience

A survey by the [Temkin Group](#) compared nine US airlines on the quality of their customer experience -- the sum of all experiences and interactions a customer has with a brand. The strategy of focusing on customer experience is built around the needs of the individual customer over the lifetime of the customer-brand relationship.

Temkin's survey ranked each airline on the criteria of functionality (how well experiences meet customer needs), accessibility (how easy it is for customers to do what they want to do), and emotion (how customers feel about the experience).

- For overall customer experience, Southwest and Alaska Airlines tied the top spot at 68%, 8 points above the average rating for the airline industry as a whole. In comparison, US Airways earned a rating of just 45%, and was the lowest ranked company in the complete survey of 246 companies in 19 industries.
- Broken down by criteria, Southwest led the pack in functionality and accessibility, while Alaska Airlines took the top spot for emotion -- meaning Alaska made customers feel good, but Southwest fulfilled their needs and goals.

Your business: Customer experience is no longer a phone call - it's now online, in live chat, and more. Each touch is specific to that customer, and you want to treat each individual reaction as such.

Examining Southwest Airlines as a case study for customer service provides valuable implications for how other companies can provide a similar experience for their own customers. Southwest takes care of its employees, which in turn helps employees take care of its customers.

It places customer service at the forefront of its mission and company culture. On a more practical level, it works to provide customers with an experience that fulfills their needs and makes it easy for them to accomplish their goals with the company.

Photo credit: [liftupatlanta.org](#), [southwest.com](#)

Megan Webb-Morgan

Megan is a writer with 3 years of writing, editing, blogging, and social media experience. She's been an author on sites such as AllBusiness, Business2Community and Virtual-Strategy. Topics of interest include: business technology, employee engagement and small business best practices. She has a Master's degree in history from SUNY Brockport and received her B.A. degree at SUNY Geneseo. Megan is an East Coast original who recently moved to the San Diego area. On the weekends, she enjoys spending time with her husband.