

ascend

Taking your airline to new heights

JET STREAM

A conversation with Wolfgang Prock-Schauer, the chief executive officer of Jet Airways.



Special Section

FUELING UP

A look at the rising cost of fuel and its effect on the industry.



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OF GOOD TIMES

Photo courtesy of Kingfisher Airlines

KINGFISHER AIRLINES, INDIA'S FASTEST-GROWING CARRIER, RELIES ON A STRONG TECHNOLOGY PLATFORM TO HELP IT OFFER UNPARALLED GUEST SERVICES.

By virtually every conceivable measure, the launch of Kingfisher Airlines was an unqualified success.

Within its first 18 months of operations, the carrier was named "Best New Airline of the Year" by the Centre for Asia Pacific Aviation, the recipient of the "Service Excellence for a New Airline" award from United Kingdom-based Skytrax and the winner of the "Best New Domestic Airline for Excellent Services and Cuisine" from the Pacific Area Travel Writers Association. And the airline that started its operations in May 2005 with four daily flights across two cities now offers 146 flights daily to an expanded network of 24 key business and leisure destinations across the country.

With product demand increasing more and more, Kingfisher Airlines realized that to manage the phenomenal growth and high



Photo by Norm Frelander/Airlines.net



Photo courtesy of Kingfisher Airlines

Run by Dr. Vijay Mallya, known as the king of good times, Kingfisher Airlines was recently named Best New Airline of the Year by the Centre of Asia Pacific Aviation.

Kingfisher Airlines was the first carrier in India to offer in-flight entertainment on its domestic flights. The airline's IFE system is equipped with video screens for every seat and includes five video channels and 10 audio channels.

levels of customer service, it required new, state-of-the-art solutions.

One of the airline's primary needs was for a reservations system that could not only accommodate its current demand but could also provide the flexibility to keep pace with its furious growth plans and changing market dynamics. Given its strong guest focus (The credo of the airline is, "There are no passengers on Kingfisher Airlines, only

The airline sought stable, proven systems that could build the foundation for it to provide customers the levels of service befitting an airline run by Dr. Vijay Mallya, the "King of Good Times."

The carrier has been redefining and expanding the travel experience of Indians in a unique way. Its new and innovative approach toward guest services has become a key differentiator for the airline and gained it a repu-

of "Kingfisher Radio" and five channels of "FUN TV." The coach cabin, known as Kingfisher Class, offers extra-wide seats, extra leg room and large overhead storage bins. The airline offers a menu of gourmet meals featuring six different vegetarian and non-vegetarian menu options for breakfast, lunch and dinner that is rotated every day.

The airline is also redefining business-class travel in India. In its premium cabin, called Kingfisher First, the airline offers seats with 48-inches of pitch that recline 125 degrees. The seats also have adjustable headrests and extendable footrests. Kingfisher First also offers an audio and video on-demand service that enables guests to enjoy the latest movies, music videos and concerts, and video games. Extra-wide screens and special noise-cancelling headphones enhance the experience.

Kingfisher Airlines was incidentally the first airline in India to offer IFE service onboard its domestic flights. Soon, even competitors followed suit.

But being the pioneers in offering IFE service onboard its domestic flights was not where Kingfisher Airlines stopped. In December, the airline partnered with dishtv, India's leading satellite TV provider, to offer live television onboard its flights. Kingfisher Airlines is the first Indian carrier and among the very few in the world that have introduced this service. Now guests flying with Kingfisher Airlines will not miss watching their favorite TV programs even while in-flight. It is this consistent drive to offer the best to its guests that keeps Kingfisher Airlines ahead of its competitors.

It's renowned levels of service and marketing prowess have garnered sev-

"The credo of the airline is, "There are no passengers on Kingfisher Airlines, only 'guests.'"

— Dr. Vijay Mallya

'guests.'"), Kingfisher Airlines also sought a system with advanced customer management tools to help it more efficiently market its schedule and drive sales. The full-service, value-focused airline also needed an advanced departure control system.

In addition to reservations capabilities, Kingfisher Airlines also desired enhanced inventory management, a frequent flyer program, an advanced online booking engine for its Web site and automated check-in services.

tation for taking superior care of its guests.

Built on the core values of "trendy, youth and lifestyle," the carrier seeks to leverage the image of Kingfisher, its mother brand. The airline believes it is not in the transportation industry, but the "aviation hospitality" business and strives to offer its guests an unparalleled "good times" experience.

Part of that experience included India's first-ever in-flight entertainment, or IFE, system with personalized video screens on every seat with 10 channels



eral additional awards, including “Most Successful Brand Launch of 2005” from the Brand Derby Survey conducted by India’s leading business daily, Business Standard. Kingfisher Airlines has also been ranked among the top 10 “buzziest brands” of 2005, and it recently won the “Brand Leadership Award” in the service and hospitality segment, beating several notable hotels, banks and other airlines. More recently, Kingfisher Airlines was recognized by Galileo Express Travel Awards of the Indian Express Group, a leading national daily, and the Frost & Sullivan Group for its innovative brand strategy, product and service.

Behind the scenes, the airline works on a sophisticated technology platform to enable such high levels of guest services across its operation as well as ensuring operational safety and efficiency while maintaining profitability.

Within six months of launching operations, the airline decided it needed the right technology partner that could support it with end-to-end software solutions and enhance its global distribution. In selecting the *Sabre Airline Solutions*® business, the airline found a partner that could provide:

- Global market coverage,
- Stable and proven systems,
- Vast airline experience,

- A dedicated technical workforce,
- A significant presence in India, one of the fastest-growing aviation markets.

“It was a well-thought-out decision,” said an airline representative. “It became very clear during the evaluation process that *Sabre [Airline Solutions]* indeed had an integrated end-to-end solution that would meet our fast growth. We were looking for an efficient, integrated one-stop shop partner, and *Sabre Airline Solutions* met all of our criteria. The dynamics of the marketplace demand adaptable but stable systems, and *Sabre Airline Solutions* provided a platform that allowed fast integration of new technologies to ensure optimum operational efficiencies.”

As soon as the airline selected *Sabre Airline Solutions*, teams from both companies gathered to brainstorm and identify ways to kick off product implementation. The first product the airline implemented, the *Sabre® Traveler Loyalty System*, enabled the airline to launch its frequent flyer program, King Club. Since the launch of the program, which offers the fastest way to earn free tickets in India, it has experienced record-breaking enrollments on a monthly basis.

Kingfisher Airlines planned to migrate to *SabreSonic™ Res* on Aug. 5. But, keeping in line with its rapid growth, the airline asked if implementation could be acceler-

ated. A team from the airline and one from the technology company that totaled more than 250 people across 44 teams from 10 countries worked around the clock and managed a complete reservations cutover 10 days ahead of schedule.

“The challenge was huge, and it was even more difficult due to the advancement of the migration date,” said Chandrashekhar Nene, vice president of information technology for Kingfisher Airlines. “Cutting off 10 days from a project already being run on a tight timeline is a very difficult task. The support provided by [*Sabre Airline Solutions*] staff in Bangalore, India, and Dallas, Texas, was superb. We had the right people at the right time.”

Soon after the initial migration, the airline was India’s first carrier to launch the *Roving Agent* module of *SabreSonic™ Check-in*, which enables check-in agents to move from behind the check-in counter to better serve guests.

Added the representative, “The *Roving Agent* module is like a check-in counter on the move. Guests no longer need to go to the check-in counter; we have ensured that the check-in counter comes to them. At Kingfisher Airlines, we constantly innovate when it comes to providing added convenience to our guests. And when we say we want them to enjoy the ‘good times’ with us, we do everything possible to ensure that. There are several more such path-breaking initiatives in the pipeline.”

Both teams continue to work on several post-cutover initiatives, and although there is still a lot of work ahead, the successful and early implementation signifies the start of a strong technology foundation for Kingfisher Airlines.

“At Kingfisher Airlines, we have always emphasized upon the importance of service and hospitality,” Mallya said. “In the past [several] months, we have introduced many world-class initiatives to add to the convenience of our guests. In the times to come, many more such innovative initiatives will be undertaken by Kingfisher Airlines.” **F**

Photo by Kingfisher Airlines



Kingfisher Airlines, which operates a fleet of 29 aircraft with 20 additional jets on order, is the first Indian carrier and among the very few in the world to partner with a satellite television provider. In December, the carrier partnered with dishtv to offer live television on its flights.

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