Making Flying Good Again

A Conversation With ...

David Cush, President and Chief Executive Officer, Virgin America

For a relative newcomer, California-based Virgin America has many “firsts.” It was the world’s first airline to implement an on-demand food and drink ordering system on every seatback. It was the first to offer fleet-wide inflight WiFi. It was the first U.S. domestic airline to offer passengers an inflight carbon offset option. It was the first airline to list its carbon footprint according to internationally accepted standards via The Climate Registry. It placed the first commercial order for the new Airbus A320neo, which will offer 15 percent fuel efficiency gains.

Virgin America’s mission is to make flying good again by reinventing domestic air travel. And based on the carrier’s numerous awards, it’s going about it the right way. Its focus is purely on its guests and teammates. As long as they are happy, everything else falls into place.

Virgin America’s appeal begins with brand new planes, attractive airfares, top notch service and a host of innovative amenities. The carrier’s fleet of Airbus A320s is highly customized with mood-lit cabins, custom-designed, roomy leather seats and the most modern in-flight entertainment systems.

The Red™ In-flight Entertainment System gives guests access to more than 30 on-demand movies and 24 channels of live television, a kids’ entertainment section, libraries to video games and music, onboard seat-to-seat chat messaging, on-demand food and beverage ordering, a digital shopping platform, and WiFi at every seat. Combining a stylish design and comfort with innovative technology provides an upscale flight at affordable rates and gives guests control over their overall in-flight experience.

For Virgin America, it’s not just about bells and whistles and special perks. It’s
about giving the traveling public their money’s worth is key to the airline’s mission.

Elevating People — Our teammates, neighbors, guests and community;...
For example, guests have wanted an ‘open tab’ function on our in-flight cocktail bar (we currently have drinks onboard submitted by Facebook fans) and other preferences on the menu, including a push for healthier items, locally brewed bears and only cage-free eggs. Comments from these audiences also helped us make other onboard changes like allowing travelers to listen to a custom soundtrack from our MP3 library rather than listen to the static videogame soundtrack when playing a game.

Q: You wrote in a letter to your guests that your pledge is to “keep doing what’s working, stop doing what isn’t and continue to come up with new stuff to make guests say, ‘this is how to fly.’” In what ways do you obtain feedback from guests? What are some of the things your airline guests like? And what have you stopped doing or changed based on guest feedback?

A: We ask our social audiences to help determine our in-flight seat pitch, 17 inches. In what ways will the new technology improve your airline?

A: We made the switch to Sabre Airline Solutions quite simply because of our growth. These are the tools we need to run a reliable operation and maximize our revenue-generating potential. Technology is an important part of our service delivery, so it is absolutely critical to our growth and success.

Q: Where do you see Virgin America in five years?

A: We see us in 30 cities and continuing to push the industry envelope in terms of innovating our product for guests.