

The Missed Flight to See Mickey!

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There I was, waiting for my flight from Providence, Rhode Island, to Minneapolis, Minnesota. I wouldn't be waiting if I hadn't been late getting to the airport and missed my flight. I almost made it to the gate before the flight departed, but the doors of the aircraft had been shut and the plane was ready to leave when I finally arrived. I would have made it had I not gone to the wrong gate; the gate I had flown out of many times before on UsAir. So, I had to wait for the next flight, with a connection through Pittsburgh.

As I waited near the gate for the next flight, so as not to miss this flight, I noticed a mother and father and their two little girls over at the pay phone. The mother seemed a little upset about something, as were the little girls. I learned that the family also had missed their flight, but they were on their way to Disney World down in Orlando, Florida – they were on their way to see Mickey!

After awhile, word came that we were about to board the flight. The regularly scheduled passengers were allowed to board first. Then, the UsAir staff called to the mother of the two little girls, who was still on the phone, to get on board – they were going to get to see Mickey! The mother quickly hung up the phone, got the attention of her husband and the little girls, and moved toward the gate, as I was still waiting to be called, if at all.

The mother passed me on her way to board the plane; then one little girl passed me, heading in the same direction; then the other, younger little girl passed me. When the latter little girl got to the point where the UsAir staff was waiting, she turned in their direction and said, **Thank You!** Then the father passed me. I was still waiting to be called! They were going to see Mickey!

Finally, I, another standby passenger, was called to board the plane – I was finally on my way to Minneapolis! As I boarded the plane, I walked through the First Class section. There they were – the family on the way to see Mickey! The UsAir staff found four seats for them in First Class. Now that's class! I continued to walk through the plane to find my seat. Oh, there it is – at the back of the plane. I wasn't going to see Mickey!

All I could think of while on route to my destination, via Pittsburgh, a great little town, was that I could only imagine the look on the family members' faces when they realized that they had been upgraded to First Class, at least to Pittsburgh. Before boarding the plane, they were very stressed because of the nature of the situation. Now, they are sitting comfortably on board the UsAir flight. The stress had to be gone; after all, they were on their way to see Mickey!

Focus: Customer service, customer relations management, service versus product offering, perishability, attitude, emotional state, word of mouth communication, transactional versus lifetime value analysis (LTV), tangible versus intangible service characteristics.

Questions

1. Discuss how each of the concepts listed in the Focus section above apply to the case.
2. From a cost perspective, evaluate the decision made by the UsAir staff with respect to the family.
3. From a marketing and customer relations perspective, evaluate the decision made by the UsAir staff with respect to the family.
4. With respect to each component of a marketing strategy, discuss how airlines compete with one another? How do they differentiate one airline from another?
5. In general, how can a service operation differentiate itself from its competition? With respect to the family situation in the case, how did the UsAir staff attempt to differentiate itself from the competition?
6. Would it be possible for UsAir to design an effective television commercial based on this event? Explain. What marketing mix attributes would be the focus of such an ad? How would UsAir attempt to differentiate itself from the competition?

For all questions, use the appropriate theories and concepts, when necessary. Do not just present case facts.