

Air Passenger Protection Regulations

Air Canada

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Recently the Canadian Transportation Agency of Canada has announced new regulations for delayed or cancelled flights, denied boarding, tarmac delays, the seating of children under the age of 14, lost or damaged baggage and the transportation of musical instruments. These regulations were released in two parts and as of Dec. 15, 2019 both parts will be in effect. This report will focus on Air Canada and how the organization is communicating these new regulations with stakeholders. This report will include a SWOT analysis, recommendation and a communications plan for Air Canada.

SWOT matrix

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Complying to regulations2. Communicating on the website how they are complying3. Explaining how they will communicate to those impacted effectively	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Website is difficult to navigate2. No contact number to call for regulation's specific questions
Opportunities	Threats
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Improve service and communication2. Transparency – by being clear and accountable to stakeholders	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Media attention2. Competitors doing a better job3. Staying on top of government regulations

Strengths

The customer service plan on the Air Canada website gives information for several different flight disruption scenarios. The organization claims in this section of the website that “if a flight is delayed or cancelled due to an unforeseen problem, we’ll do our best to keep you well-informed at the airport and onboard the affected aircraft” (Air Canada, n.d.-a, para. 3). This is following the Canadian Transportation Agency requirement under the organizations' flight disruption section of their website. Most of the information provided on Air Canada’s website is paraphrased from the Canada Transportation Agency under the Air Passenger Protection Regulations Highlights.

One of the promises from Air Canada is that they will be providing timely updates for customers at 30-minute intervals with information regarding new departures and new travel arrangements (Air Canada, n.d.-a, para. 3); this is an exact requirement within transportation regulations which states, “Airlines will have to provide flight status updates every 30 minutes until a new departure time has been confirmed but must provide information as soon as it is available, which in some cases is before 30 minutes” (Canadian Transportation Agency, 2019, para. 7). This is communicated well to passengers from Air Canada as it is on their website and explains that contact information is taken from passengers when purchasing flights to ensure that these updated can be provided (Air Canada, n.d.-a, para.2). Air Canada is strong in complying with these regulations by having the requirements that they are complying with directly on their website.

Weaknesses

The information about compensation plans is difficult to find on the website because the different tab options are so vague. Compensation plan information can be found easily when

searching “Air Canada compensation plan,” into a search engine, but on the organization website, it is very difficult to find.

Within the short paragraph describing denied boarding situations, it is mentioned that if volunteers offer to give up their seat on an overbooked flight they will be given compensation in return for their seat (Air Canada, n.d.-a, para. 11). Unfortunately, it is not effectively communicated on what exactly is meant by compensation. When trying to find these answers the site takes you to another link that has a more detailed description. The website offers quick links that can help to navigate the website, but then those links take you down the page and that often results in being redirected to more links. The process of finding answers on your specific situation takes jumping through many hoops before one knows exactly what it means for their specific situation.

Additionally, there is no phone number online attached to regulation information to be used to contact the company if one has any confusion on what category they fit under. Under the customer support contact information section, two numbers and an email address are provided, but it is unclear which of the three is the best to contact in this situation (Air Canada, n.d.-b, p. 1). This gives the impression that if a traveller is impacted by a flight delay or denied boarding it is up to them to know what they are entitled to.

Opportunities

The new legislation creates the opportunity to provide better service to customers and to improve communication. The regulations include monetary compensation for travellers who are impacted by a disruption; this gives the organization even more incentive to provide good customer service, so paying customers for poor service regularly is not ideal. With the amount of media attention that is coming from these new compensation rules, travellers will be looking to

see how companies react to these regulations and if it makes their travel experience better. This is the opportunity for Air Canada to provide exceptional customer service. This can be done through the use of their social media. Many people go to Twitter to complain about airlines, this creates a communications opportunity for Air Canada if implemented properly.

With the difficulty in navigation on the Air Canada website to find information, this gives the organization opportunity to improve upon this and increase transparency. This can be done through the use of social media. The use of social media can increase the accountability of employees with stakeholders, this is because accountability is established through the documentation of actions and the communication of intent (Treem & Murthy, 2015, p. 56). Staying on top of the progress being made by Air Canada employees will help to ensure that the customer service quality is maintained.

Threats

With the new regulations just coming into effect, it makes it increasingly more difficult for Air Canada to control the narrative about how it works and who it impacts. There are different amounts of compensation for different lengths in disruptions and they vary in different places (Canadian Transport Agency, 2019, para. 4). The news might not give the most accurate information to travellers which can cause them to have an unreasonable expectation, or cause disapproval toward airlines. Many reports are showing the maximum amount that a traveller can be compensated for (CAA, n.d., para. 4) which can be troublesome for the airline when having to clarify with a customer what exactly their situation qualifies for. For example, a recent article from CBC talks about the amount of compensation one is entitled to based on hours delayed but does not mention that this amount varies based on the size of the airline (CBC, 2019, para. 5).

Each airline will have to comply to these regulations, but Air Canada's competitors are doing a better job of complying and communicating to customers, this could threaten loyalty to the organization and result in customers choosing to fly with different airlines. Another significant threat for Air Canada is regulations changes; it will be important for Air Canada to stay on top of this, as any incident of non-compliance can result in a \$25 000 fine (Canadian Transport Agency, 2019, para. 17).

Recommendations

To effectively communicate these new regulations with stakeholders, Air Canada needs to make this information more accessible. This can be done by making the website more user-friendly. They can do that by making a tab on their website that clearly states that is it for information regarding disruptions and denied boarding. The organization should also implement a phone number that is used specifically for this purpose as well, to give customers as much help in navigating these regulations as possible. These two changes will help to improve communication regarding this service and create transparency so that stakeholders trust that they are living up to their promises of providing the highest quality of services to all of their customers (Air Canada, n.d.-a, para. 1).

Communication plan

A suggested communication plan for Air Canada is a media event that will be held to inform the media about their involvement and commitment as an organization following the new regulations, and what they are going to do to comply with them. This will create transparency with stakeholders and will clarify any areas that could be misinterpreted through other media sources. The event will include media kits and a speech from the CEO Calin Rovinescu (Air Canada, n.d.-c, para. 1) who will also field questions from the media. Rovinescu will speak about

the regulations and the ways that Air Canada is committed to complying to these regulations, as well as information on where customers can go to find specific information. He will also be announcing the new phone number that customers can call; the number will be dedicated to answering questions specifically for those impacted by a delay or boarding denial, or anyone looking to get questions answered about anything related to that. This can be communicated with the public through an Instagram post as illustrated in Appendix A.

Air Canada already communicates with customers regularly through Twitter, but many of their posts include apologies for late replies. A communication plan to improve this is by forming a team of people dedicated to answering customers' questions and concerns on a timely basis. The Twitter team will be responsible for replying to tweets that tag the organization's Twitter handle, as well as scanning twitter for the mention of Air Canada in a tweet about a question or concern. These tweets replies from Air Canada representatives will request that the customer direct message (DM) the organization directly where more information can be given. From there the organization will communicate privately with the customer to provide information to them directly. This communication will be executed as demonstrated in Appendix B.

Conclusion

After analyzing the organization and this specific case study, it was found that Air Canada has successfully implemented the new regulations into its website as required. There is still room for improvement in terms of communicating changes to stakeholders in an easily accessible way to promote transparency within their organization. The recommendations of making information easier to find and creating a separate phone number will make the lives of customers already experiencing an inconvenience much easier. The suggested communications plan

of hosting a media event and providing more timely responses on social media will help to improve Air Canada's execution of providing exceptional customer service and to avoid any PR mishaps by keeping a finger on the pulse of any potential crisis'.

References

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Appendix A

Figure One: Instagram Post for Media Event



Appendix B

Figure Two: Tweet for New Communication Method Regarding Delay and Compensation Regulations

