# Service Recovery Done Right Pays Off for US Airways

In the airline industry, as in others, attracting and retaining preferred customers takes a lot of effort.  US Airways focused their efforts on providing reliable operations and made tremendous strides. With operations in check, attention shifted to service – more specifically, service recovery. US Airways knew that to deliver service standards, especially in service recovery situations, each employee's skill and attitude is critical.

## The business need

US Airways wanted to engage its Reservations and Airport Customer Service employees in understanding the benefits of delivering excellent service and, when gaps occur, service recovery. When a customer is dissatisfied and US Airways employees can correct that service failure, the customer is more likely to become or continue to be a loyal or preferred customer than if no service dissatisfaction occurred in the first place! US Airways needed a way to bring this concept to life so everyone understood, consistently and clearly, the importance of being reliable and the steps involved in the service recovery model. The solution needed to link to US Airways' goal of being reliable by continuing as one of the best carriers in operating performance and being the best of the network carriers in service recovery.

## The solution

With Root, US Airways created a Strategic *Learning Map®* module that focused on being reliable through operations and service recovery. They celebrated past operational successes and explored the top service-related customer expectations, with service recovery expectations ranked among the top. They saw that, if customers don't get the level of service they require, they tell millions of other customers, potentially tarnishing the brand. Worse yet, they could lose highly valued frequent flyers, which means losing a lot of future business.

Employees discussed how, for many customer expectations, they themselves had control of the situation, such as keeping customers informed of delays or responding well when things go wrong. Participants reviewed their role in basic service standards and explored the step-by-step process for service recovery by using the LEAD model – Listen, Empathize, Apologize, and Deliver.

## Implementation

The Strategic *Learning Map®* module was rolled out at 41 airports and five reservation centers across the international carrier's system in June 2010. Employees traveled to the nearest station, enabling them to meet other US Airways' employees. The sessions consisted of four-hour facilitator-led small group discussions that included a 90-minute *Learning Map®* experience using a visual, data cards, and dialogue centered on Service Recovery (context and content) and 2.5 hours of detailed work focused on practicing and applying what had been covered and learning tactics of specific service recovery tools.

| Nov. On-Time Arrivals | |
| --- | --- |
| *(Percent of flights arriving within 14 minutes of published time)* | |
| 1.  United | 91.4 |
| 2.  US Airways | 86.0 |
| 3.  American | 85.3 |
| 4.  Continental | 83.6 |
| 5.  Delta | 80.8 |

| Nov. Customer Complaints | |
| --- | --- |
| *(Complaints per 100,000 enplanements to the DOT)* | |
| 1.  US Airways | 0.97 |
| 2.  Continental | 1.10 |
| 3.  American | 1.11 |
| 4.  United | 1.22 |
| 5.  Delta | 1.38 |

| Nov. Baggage Mishandlings | |
| --- | --- |
| *(Reports per 1,000 passengers)* | |
| 1.  US Airways | 1.88 |
| 2.  Continental | 2.27 |
| 3.  United | 2.41 |
| 4.  Delta | 2.70 |
| 5.  American | 2.91 |

## Results

As a result of the sessions, US Airways experienced some great results. Kerry Hester, Senior Vice President, Operations Planning and Support, said, "Our expanded customer service training and consistent focus on our customers is clearly paying off."

US Airways saw utilization rates of service recovery tools nearly double after the training, and other service-related metrics increased nearly 15%. Customers noticed – airport complaints were down, and US Airways finished with the fewest U.S. Department of Transportation complaints among the nation's major hub and spoke airlines three times during the year.

US Airways also finished with a first-place ranking for the year in baggage handling, and finished second in on-time performance. These accomplishments mean a better travel experience for customers and bonuses for US Airways employees. The company paid out over $22 million system-wide in 2010 for performance incentives!

Hester said, "This is a true testament to our focus on running a reliable operation and recovering well when things don't go as planned."

---

**Root Inc.**
5470 Main Street
Sylvania, OH 43560
+1 888 574 0077
info@rootinc.com
rootinc.com

**About Root**
Root is a strategy execution company that helps organizations engage people as a catalyst for change using a proven framework that consistently achieves clarity, ownership, and results.

*root*
people . strategy . results.®

071114