

Achieving client satisfaction on board

by Martina Rohm

In-flight Service determines airline passengers' decision

Due to rapid changes and new trends in the aviation business, continuous product revision is required to respond to customer demand and to react to increasing competition.

Lufthansa Consulting has developed a specialized in-flight service evaluation system which reviews and assesses the onboard product of airlines, in detail, and can be adapted to particular customer requests. The client receives a comprehensive analysis of more than one hundred single product elements as a basis to review the overall in-flight product strategy and to improve processes on board.

The In-flight Product today

Customer satisfaction is an essential goal for each airline providing passenger services. The on board experience is still something special for the client. The customer has a wide choice to select the appropriate airline product according to their requirements. Therefore, airlines are continuously working on the in-flight product development and innovation to differentiate themselves from competitors.

During the last few years a variety of in-flight product innovations have entered into the market. This includes the aircraft seat on long haul flights as an important product element which is continuously being improved and renewed according to its life cycle and changing customer requirements. The current development of Business Class seat roll-outs shows the significance of this product element which influences the buying decision of the passenger especially on long haul flights. Lufthansa's recently introduced PrivateBed, Singapore Airlines' SpaceBed and Air France's Espace Affaires seat are just a small selection. Most high quality airlines are constantly striving to enhance the seating comfort to achieve competitive advantage.

Also the "classic" Food & Beverage Service has passed through numerous product enhancement activities recently. "Carry-On Cuisine" where passengers can order their meal at a restaurant to be delivered at the airport, "On-Demand Meal Service" with more personal attention and a wider selection available, "In-Flight Café" on flights introducing additional charges for meals and snacks are examples of product diversification.

A recent new development is “FlyNet”, access to internet and e-mail on board established by Lufthansa, which enables the passenger to work and to communicate using facilities comparable to those on the ground.

Lufthansa Consulting’s In-flight Service Check

What happens if a passenger leaving the aircraft feels discontented? Questions like “Why do I pay such a high ticket price for unfriendly service, a cold meal and uncomfortable seating?” can be thoughts of an unsatisfied customer. Consequently, due to the negative experience, the client will reconsider the buying decision for further flights and will probably switch to another airline. This kind of situation belongs to the daily business in the passenger airline industry. How can this kind of situation be recognized by an airline if passengers do not communicate their opinion? To meet customer expectations passengers’ point of view and experiences are of enormous importance for a carrier. Therefore, the airline should research the opinions and satisfaction levels of clients and consider this situation as a challenge to review and potentially enhance product and performance.

Which kind of instruments are established in the service sector to discover passenger impressions? How is it possible to monitor to what extent an airline keeps its product promises according to passengers’ perception? Customer surveys on board or on the ground and customer feedback are common tools. Is there any other opportunity to get a complete picture of their own performance from a neutral external perspective?

Lufthansa Consulting has developed a suitable and fast alternative to the challenge of product assessment. The **In-flight-Service-Check** is an evaluation tool to assess the airline on-board product presenting an entire analysis from an experienced external point of view. This in-depth analysis is a comprehensive base for a review of the in-flight product strategy. It is a vital source to develop opportunities for product enhancement or change.

In a recent project example Lufthansa Consulting was assigned by an airline to evaluate the in-flight product and to give recommendations for product improvement and cost cutting potential. Lufthansa Consulting examined the airline’s in-flight service performance on all aircraft types, in the available classes on domestic, regional and intercontinental routes. The client selected the flights together with the Lufthansa Consulting expert who joined the flights undercover as a regular passenger unknown to the cabin crew to ensure the real situation.

Lufthansa Consulting’s In-flight-Service-Check, which is subdivided into eight main categories, contains more than one hundred single product elements to be evaluated. The Checklist includes all relevant components of

the in-flight product which are recognized and experienced by the passenger.

The categories **Cabin Interior** and **Seat Area** include passenger comfort, facilities, appearance and cleanliness. **Flight Attendants** are evaluated by appearance, performance and customer orientation. The **Cockpit Crew** is also included in terms of communication with the passengers. **Service Equipment** implies components used by the cabin crew and by the passengers. **Food & Beverage Service** is evaluated by menu composition and meal elements, drink selection and service processes. The area of **Entertainment** contains reading material as well as audio and video facilities and supply. **Amenities** include communication facilities, in-flight shopping and other comfort items.



The seven level measurement is applied to the in-flight product characteristics and reflects "Best Practice Standard (ranking 5)" as basis for the evaluation. The complete range goes from "not available (0)" to "outstanding (7)". Requirements for improvement are indicated and recommended by the critical "Point of Trust (4)". This describes the desired threshold which indicates the overall in-flight product and performance that the airline conveys to its customers. This standardized measurement system is flexible and can be adapted to the airline's specific market environment.

After analyzing the assessment phase Lufthansa Consulting prepares a comprehensive report presenting strengths and weaknesses of the in-flight

product and evaluating each product element for the individual flight. Recommendations for improvement conclude the report. Some findings are for example: different service levels on comparable routes, inconsistent awareness of customer care and safety/security matters by the flight attendants, cabin interior in poor condition and not well maintained, etc.

A potential next step can be to set up an internal task force to deal with the results of the In-flight-Service-Check and to draw up an implementation plan by means of the report beginning by realizing “quick wins”. Lufthansa Consulting is also in the position to accompany and support the implementation process if requested by the client.

The In-flight-Service-Check - A tool to support service quality assurance

The In-flight Service Check is designed to initiate a continuous quality management. Lufthansa Consulting recommends implementing the standardized and regular in-flight service evaluation tool as a basis to assure a consistent in-flight product. The passenger expects to receive the anticipated appropriate level of service by the airline on every flight. Therefore, a regular review of performance and quality is essential to guarantee that passenger expectations are fulfilled. The results of the flight audits give information about the consistency of the product strategy. Identified variations can be responded to promptly. Furthermore, the airline has the chance to scrutinize the discrepancies if the product strategy is not followed or inherently not feasible.

A logical next step would be the revision and adaptation of the In-flight Service Manual according to processes observed onboard. Furthermore, the integration of passenger survey results and complaints should belong to a standard in-flight service enhancement process.

Due to the dynamic market development in the airline business a continuous review and improvement, where necessary, or adjustment of product and performance is essential to remain competitive.

Lufthansa Consulting's In-flight Service Check is a state-of-the-art tool evaluating the in-flight product of airlines of every type and size. It presents an entire analysis of the airline's in-flight product quality and performance.

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