

WestJet

by Julia Mayben

WESTJET AT-A-GLANCE

Location: Calgary, Alberta

Hours of operation: 24 hours, seven days a week

FTEs: 380 in the customer service center; 4 client support desk agents (all part-time)

Services provided: Customer service inquiries

Channels handled: Mostly phone in customer service; client care desk responds to emails and letters

Notable: Implemented a real-time, experience-based management system that enabled the airline to improve services and build a customer information database.

When WestJet wants to get reactions from customers about their experiences with the airline, it has immediate access to the information, thanks to the recent integration of an experience-based management system that has automated the delivery of real-time customer feedback. In addition to providing the company with a database of valuable customer information, the technology has given the airline a tool to ensure customer satisfaction.

"The technology tells us what our guests are feeling and how their experience was throughout WestJet. With their comments, we can make changes on a real-time basis and fix processes that are broken," explains Rosanna Imbrogno, director of customer service for WestJet.

A Painless Integration

WestJet, Canada's second largest airline, installed the technology from ResponseTek a year ago. At the heart of the technology is an online survey that WestJet customers can access via a link on the airline's Web site called "WestJet's Interactive Feedback Corner." There, a customer can rate the airline and comment on various aspects of customer service from touch points throughout WestJet.

WestJet promotes the survey option to customers at virtually every opportu-

nity, beginning with telephone agents as customers make reservations and ending with the inflight team when customers are traveling. The survey is also publicized in the WestJet inflight magazine.

As soon as a customer fills out the information, it is tabulated by ResponseTek and graded according to pre-set standards. The ratings information is then stored and comments are sent to WestJet's client support desk, which is a part of the airline's 380-agent reservations center in Calgary, Alberta.

Four agents from the reservations center were selected to man the client support desk. "They are the most experienced agents in the center, not just in terms of years, but the amount of knowledge they have," says Imbrogno.

While most of the customer feedback inquiries are received via email, a few letters also come to the call center. The response time for correspondence – traditional or electronic – is within 24 hours, though Imbrogno says, with email messages, they're often able to respond as quickly as one hour after the inquiry is received.

On average, the four-person client support desk handles about 1,250 email inquiries and 200 letters from customers each month, which Imbrogno calls "amazing."

The agents at the desk are trained to resolve issues, delegate them to another

department or escalate them to higher authority within the company. Typically, the agents stay involved as the primary point of contact for customers until the issue is closed. The agents are also responsible for summarizing the stored ratings into monthly, detailed reports, which are forwarded to various departments.

Whether viewed real-time or through the reports, the customer feedback information is reviewed carefully, says Imbrogno. "We want to see trends before we react to something by making changes."

Continuously Evolving

Currently, only the agents at the client care desk have access to real-time customer feedback. But in the not-too-distant future, Imbrogno hopes that managers of various departments will be able to log on to the system so that they can review responses in real time. She also sees a need for agents in the reservations center to have access to the information. As she explains, "People who don't use the Internet need a way to offer their feedback to the reservations agent so they can help to solve issues and capture customer information."

Other possible ways for customers to communicate their experiences with WestJet in the future include the self-service kiosks and PDAs.

As exciting as the technology options might be, Imbrogno says there are limitations. "We never want to use technology to replace customer service, instead we want to use it to enhance the customer experience," she explains.

In the meantime, Imbrogno says WestJet is pleased with the ability to capture customer experiences in real time. "We're able to deal with customer comments quickly, and that reinforces our culture. We're very customer-focused, which isn't always the norm in customer service. We never lose sight that they're the ones who keep us in business. Who better to hear from?" 