

HOW TO NOT TO BE A ME TOO

**A practical guide to
modern airline
success**

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Preface

This book is a collection of ideas, developed and inspired from analysing through many airline take offs, successes and departures.

It is easy to launch an airline (if you have the money), but it is hard to make a profitable one. We are seeing many airlines copying each other. Trying to become the Southwest of Asia or the Emirates of Europe, but without much success. This book looks at practical ideas, strategies and solutions, that you can use to make your airline a success. And one that is not a me-too. Let's begin the journey!

Contents

1. Why Not to be a Me Too
2. The Brand
3. The Employees
4. The Product
5. The Way Forward

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Why Not to be a Me Too

Copying, and trying to copy, another airline is easy. But finding success with it, is hard. Every airline operates in an environment different from others, with its own unique strengths and weaknesses.

In this scenario, the best choice for an airline to achieve sustainable profitability of its own, is to stop trying to be a me too, and to create a strategic path of its own for success. This helps the airline to build its own strengths and advantages that cannot be easily duplicated by the competitors, and enables it to learn from others' mistakes and to reduce its weaknesses. This eBook is an attempt at explaining that path..

The Brand

Having the right brand is the key for differentiation for your airline. This is not only where you create all the buzz about what you offer, but also where your foundation for success is. The latter is often underestimated by many.

Can you imagine an AirAsia without the flashy red colour, ever smiling Tony Fernandes or the unique crew (whom are called Allstars) ? Or an Emirates Airline without the Airbus A380s or the premium amenities? Or even a Singapore Airlines without the Singapore Girl?

The brand is your foundation for differentiation. It can either make or break your future.

Have a brand that fits your airline's positioning, one that makes you look unique, and one that gets you the attention.

The Brand

And, a brand is not just what your trademark represents. An airline's brand is everywhere that it is - both on the sky and on the ground. Ranging from your brand name to your livery to your staff attitude (and their uniform) - it is all about your brand.

If you're just starting out, define your brand first. Or if you're an existing brand, and lost without success - review your brand. Adjust your brand elements to fit the new market reality, and at an extreme case - dare to rebrand.

The brand should leave no questions to the passenger about what are the expectations they can have about you. The brand should enable the customer to make the decision to buy.

The Employees

Your workforce is the bridge to your airline's success. They are the ones who can decide your airline's fate. This section discusses about four key areas related to employees.

1. Selecting Employees 2. Getting the best out of them 3. Dealing with Employees 4. Staying with(out) unions

1. Selecting the right employees

This is a tricky business. When you're a human, and about to sign a (potentially) life-time contract with another human - selection is not as easy as voting for a reality show contestant. The reality is, people can often deceive. The one with the best track record might be one who comes with a heavy ego and does not fit your work culture. The one with no track record might be the one who will deliver the best.

Selecting The Employees

Hence, selecting the **right** employees is a tougher task than scanning through a set of CVs. The person whom you should hire is one who has the ability to deliver, dedicate themselves to the company's success and help you to win together.

So that, limit the CV scanning just for selecting the cream of the crop, and instead start looking for the following qualities.

1. Passion
2. Ability
3. Drive

If you can find many people with those qualities, then you're in luck. But chances are that, finding many such people will often be very hard. So let's look at how to give most of those qualities to the people you have already hired.

Getting the best out of them

Keeping a passionate, optimistic workforce is a driver for success at any organization. How to make this happen?

To begin with it, you should first build a healthy work relationship with your employees. Make them feel that the airline recognizes their efforts and rewards them. Let no chance for a fear to build up in your employees' minds - and let them be open and straightforward about how they feel about the company. Listen to them, and let them speak up. Sometimes the best ideas come from the bottom of your org chart.

Keep everything transparent and give them a sense of ownership.

Getting the best out of them

Always have a meritocratic system of promotions. This ensures that the talent comes to the top, and that all of your future projects will be spearheaded by that leadership to be naturally successful. And it also guarantees, that you will always be paying only for the productive, to get the best work done.

Link the bonuses to performance only. This will encourage your talented staff to work better, and will push the lazy to do better work. Let them be confident and have the ability to tell anything to you directly.

These steps will provide them with the key qualities that you need to succeed and make your airline a place that they can't wait to wake up and go back to.

What matters is not what you pay them, but the way you treat them.

Dealing with the Employees

For most companies, this is the hardest part. But if you do it right, it could become the easiest part.

An ideal airline should have very few overhead and zero bureaucracy. This helps you to make the **right** decisions, fast.

How to make it happen?

Simple. Care for your employees.

This will assure to your employees that they are treated in the right way by the airline.

And it will also mean that your staff will naturally tend to care about your customers as well. If you do not care for your staff, do not expect them to care for your customers.

But that's not all..

Staying with(out) Unions

.. Taking care of your staff will also ensure that they will never need a union.

Unions are something that I dislike to have in an airline. You can see the damage that some unions have done, for airlines such as American, British Airways and Qantas. This, however is not the union's fault alone, either.

The employees will never need a union in the first place, if you take care of them. If you do not have unions right now, care for your staff, and you shall stay without the unions.

If you do have unions already, care for your staff better now on, so that the unions will not obstruct and participate in your growth strategy.

An ideal airline's workforce should be one big family.

The Product

Another important factor in defining your airline is, it's product. In this context, the **product** that we refer to is not simply the on board product that you offer, but the overall end product that you deliver to the customer.

The 4S'es of our product definition consists of the following elements

1. Service
2. Seating
3. Schedule
4. Selection

The Product

Service

Service is the on ground, and on board service that you offer to the passenger. This may range from the lounges to the quality of meals to your cabin crew's smile. This element contains of the key touch points of your passengers' interaction with your airline, and is the best (and perhaps) opportunity for you to set that ever lasting impression in your customers' minds.

This element sets the cornerstone of your airline's potential repeat sales - as well as the foundation for any word of mouth marketing. Hence, ignore it at your peril.

The Product

Seating

The aircraft's seating, the IFE and the cabin amenities, are a key denominator in defining your product. There has recently been a trend of one upping, or matching, your competitors offering in terms of the cabin product; with the expectation that doing so will bring more passengers. However, the reality is far from this.

The key to having the right cabin product, is to simply match the expectations that you set to your customer with your **Brand**. Even if your product's feature set is less than that of your competitor, but you have set your brand attributes properly, you will still have a better chance in attracting new customers.

You will have to adapt your Product accordingly to the segment as well, since a passenger from Geneva to Hong Kong

The Product

will have higher wants, and needs, than that of a passenger from Chongqing to Beijing. Read your customers' mind, and offer what they need - just that, and nothing more.

Schedule

Having the right schedule increases your chances in attracting not only more customers, but also higher yield traffic. Focus on having the right aircraft with the right **Seating** operated at the times that the customer expects, in order to increase the **Selection**.

The Product

Selection

Aiding with the passengers selection process is the element that will complete your **Product**. A proper **Selection** element can be created by focusing on the following areas.

- Booking process
 - Having the right booking engine
 - Right distribution strategy
 - Ease of payment
- Discoverability
 - Having the right marketing
 - The right website
 - Non-confusing presentation of what the airline has to offer

The Product

Having a great product is not about having the most expensive cabin product or the meals, but about doing what you do right. If you can deliver a seamless air travel experience that is in line with the customer's expectation, then you have created a great product.

The key to success, is not to limit your product to just the cabin product, but to deliver an outstanding and seamless experience from the moment the customer enters the airport to the moment they leave the destination airport.

Getting better is always better. So keep an eye on what can be improved, and how can it be improved, and have that relentless pursuit for better.

The Way Forward

Once you have the aforementioned steps done and in place, your airline will have started moving on the path to becoming a different, and successful airline. A giant that was asleep has awoken for your service, and now you need to ensure that this giant's energy is continuously flowing in the right direction.

Like I mentioned at the beginning, every airline's strategy should differ according to its specific market realities, and hence going into a discussion on how to improve your pricing, yield management, network planning or cargo will prove to be pointless for this eBook.

But here are some tips to ensure that you drive your giant on the right path.

Let's turn over to the next page.

The Way Forward

Take Risks and Face Challenges

The airline industry is so closely connected to the world economy, that our industry is often prone to unexpected crises. But, a good airline should not change its course in the face of these temporary effects and should instead take contingency steps to ensure that the damage is minimal. Challenges are there to be overcome. You should never be afraid to take the risk. While doing so, keep a close eye on your KPIs, so that the moment something goes wrong, it can be corrected.

The Way Forward

Have less hierarchy.

Always have little hierarchy. This enables your airline to make decisions fast, and is exactly the factor that differentiates successful airlines from the unsuccessful in our industry, right now.

Let new ideas emerge. Innovate, innovate, innovate.

No organization can hold on to its position without innovation. Innovation is the key to ensuring that your airline does not become a me-too and a copycat of another airline's, perhaps less successful (on your market), methodologies. Let new ideas emerge within your organization, and encourage it. Never limit your employees' thinking. Give confidence to their abilities.

The Way Forward

Dare to be different.

AirAsia (and AirAsia X), Cathay Pacific, Emirates, Hawaiian, jetBlue, Ryanair, Southwest, United, none of these airlines - and even the Apple company will not be here today, if they did not dare to be different.

Go, make a difference. Make your shareholders proud.

The Finishing Touch

This eBook might have been shorter than you expected. And that is intentionally. Just like no airline should be a 'me-too', no solution is 'one-fits-all' too. The goal behind this eBook is to make you think. To think and to be different. To adapt and to make use of the ideas here.

I wish you all the best!

Miyuru Sandaruwan

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The awesome unicorn photo is from [Valerie Everett](#)