

British Airways World Cargo

British Airways

British Airways is the world's biggest international airline, carrying more passengers from one country to another than any of its competitors. In 1999–2000, more than 41 million people chose to fly on the 538 000 flights that it operated. Some 30 million of those passengers flew internationally, representing around 1 in every 15 people flying from one country to another worldwide.

British Airways operates 321 aircraft, covering a worldwide route network of 233 destinations in 96 countries. The group employs more than 60 000 people in over 100 countries worldwide. London's Heathrow Airport (the world's largest international airport) and Gatwick Airport are the main operating bases. The company's spectacular, purpose-built headquarters are at Waterside, near Heathrow Airport.

British Airways' stated corporate mission is: *'To be the undisputed leader in world travel'*.

British Airways World Cargo

British Airways World Cargo (BAWC) is the fifth largest international cargo airline. In 1999–2000, the airline carried 897 000 tonnes of freight, mail and courier shipments across a global network spanning more than 160 destinations in over 80 countries, generating revenues of £556 million (€800 million).

Cargo is a core business activity for British Airways, 90 per cent of all cargo is carried in the holds of passenger aircraft, supplemented with additional outsourced freighter capacity on key routes in Asia, the Americas, Africa and the Indian Sub Continent. The airline transports a wide variety of products, including fresh fruits, flowers and vegetables, pharmaceuticals, a vast range of high-tech products, spare parts for cars and ships, textiles and fashion goods, and even family pets relocating overseas with their owners. BAWC was also the largest carrier of Beaujolais Nouveau to markets all over the world in November 1999. The airline's freighter and passenger services carried more than 1800 tonnes of 1999 'Beaujo' to destinations in the USA, Japan and Australia. Customers include freight forwarders such as BAX Global, Danzas AEI and Expeditors; integrators such as FedEx and DHL; and niche forwarders such as Jag Freight.

British Airways World Cargo's services aim to combine speed and flexibility with value for money. The organization has undertaken a five- year, £250 million (€360 million)-plus global change programme which is nearing completion. The programme has included investments in facilities, new technology and training. The aim is to make BAWC the first choice cargo airline for customers transporting goods anywhere in the world.

British Airways introduce a corporate service style

British Airways takes great pride in seeking to deliver the highest levels of innovative customer service. In January 2000, it unveiled £600 million (€864 million) worth of new customer services and products, to be introduced during the next two years. This is the biggest investment of its kind in airline history. It includes flat beds in the Club World long-haul business cabin, and a fourth cabin, World Traveller Plus, for full-fare Economy passengers on long-haul flights.

In further efforts to improve the quality of service delivery British Airways recently introduced a 'corporate service style'. Employees across the airline, both those in customer-facing roles and those in support functions, were encouraged to adopt this service style when interacting with customers and with their colleagues.

The development of the service style included qualitative research with BA

passengers and staff in the UK and in key overseas markets. The research identified customer needs which BA's brand management team translated into 'service style standards' or attributes of the service style. Service style behaviours, or behaviour intended to support those service style attributes, were also defined.

Service style for British Airways World Cargo

Then in the spring of 2000 a project was carried out to consider whether British Airways service style could be adapted for British Airways World Cargo.

BAWC operates as an autonomous contribution centre within BA. All central functions are located at the World Cargo Centre in Heathrow and not at the airline's Waterside headquarters. The BAWC commercial and operational offices throughout the world are on the whole separate from British Airways' passenger operations.

Some important branding issues were raised. The British Airways' brand lends a significant amount of brand value to the BAWC brand. As a result, the BAWC brand character has traditionally mirrored that of British Airways. On an operational level, BAWC is dependent upon BA aircraft and flight crew to facilitate the delivery of its products and services.

On the other hand BAWC operates in a predominantly business-to-business market, and currently occupies a different position in that marketplace (a follower not a leader). The passenger side of British Airways is pursuing a strategy of product leadership, whereas BAWC is pursuing a strategy of operational excellence.

The project was to focus on formulating a service style for BAWC. It was identified that the service style needed to strike a balance between being appropriate to national cultures around the world and maintaining consistency across those cultures. The air cargo market in which BAWC operates is becoming increasingly global, and building a 'global brand' and ensuring its customers experience similar service regardless of where they are was viewed as vital to the organization.

The process of developing a service style for British Airways World Cargo

The initial question was whether BAWC should seek to adapt the existing British Airways service style, or create a completely new service style for BAWC. There was some debate. One argument was that an adaptation of the existing British Airways service style might be inappropriate, because the research for it was conducted in a passenger, rather than a cargo, context. Others argued that as the BAWC brand derives significant brand equity from the BA brand, it could be important that the BAWC service style mirrors that of BA. This approach, it was argued, would encourage consistency of experience when customers interact with BA and BAWC. It was also pointed out that a number of key decision-makers within BAWC's customers are known to be frequent flyers with the airline. In the meantime British Airways had taken the decision that the whole of its organization would be embracing the new service style across all its operations and all the countries where it operates. On balance it was concluded that BAWC should now develop a service style by adapting the existing British Airways service style to reflect the differences between the passenger and cargo operations.

Questions were raised about the development of a specified service style. Three approaches were considered:

- 1** A global set of service style standards and behaviours, developed centrally and consistently implemented across the world.

- 2** A global set of service style standards and behaviours, centrally developed and adapted to different national cultures.

3 A global set of service style standards and behaviours, centrally developed and locally adapted to different national cultures.

To explore these issues an extensive research exercise was carried out within British Airways and BAWC. A draft BA service style for BAWC was produced, and feedback obtained from overseas managers and BAWC service delivery teams. Proposals were evaluated in the light of a number of models taken from the management literature on culture and cultural differences.

The service style attributes, which emerged from the research, were:

Recognition

What does the customer experience?

I feel that BAWC people recognize me as an individual.

Customer focus

What does the customer experience?

When I am with BAWC people, I feel as though I am their number one priority.

Effective action

What does the customer experience?

BAWC people take accountability and deliver.

Being proactive

What does the customer experience?

BAWC people focus on what they can do, not what they can't.

Delivering on our promises

What does the customer experience?

BAWC people understand my requirements and deliver a solution of standard processes and services.

Teamwork

What does the customer experience?

I see BAWC people across the world work as a team to deliver for me.

The recommended approach was the third option; to articulate the BA service style for BAWC through the eyes of the customer and provide the local BAWC offices with a menu of behaviours intended to create that customer experience. The local offices could define how they will create that customer experience by selecting the behaviours appropriate to the national culture and agree 'their' service style with the BAWC Brand Management team in London. The objective was to maintain a consistency of brand throughout the world, while delivering a customer experience appropriate to the national culture.

Example of a BA service style for BAWC menu:

Recognition

What does the customer experience?

I feel that BAWC people recognize me as an individual.

How can you do it?

Approach customers who may require assistance.

Give immediate attention to approaching customers.
Acknowledge and greet each customer. Be welcoming.
Introduce yourself by name.
Use the customer's name.
Smile.
Establish eye contact.
Maintain open body language.
Maintain a confident and friendly tone of voice.
Maintain a smart appearance—exceed the uniform standards.
Wear your name badge.
Be calm and in control.
Acknowledge all customer 'thank-yous'.
End each customer interaction with a pleasant close.
On farewell, ask if any further assistance is required.

What is it not?

Displaying low energy levels.
Not making eye contact.
Being uncertain about the task or the next steps.
Being aloof.
Being indifferent.
Having a lack of pride.

Customer focus

What does the customer experience?
When I'm with BAWC people, I feel as though
I'm their number one priority.

How do you do it?

Show empathy.
Demonstrate respect.
Show care and consideration.
Listen to customers' needs and concerns.
Treat all customers' concerns and issues as a priority.
Maintain a presence at all customer facing points.
Maintain a welcoming and approachable posture.
Face the customer.
Have an optimistic attitude.
Keep personal items out of sight.
If still finishing a task from the last customer, do not ignore approaching customers; greet them and explain when you will be available.
Clarify your understanding of the problem or issue directly with the customer. On no account should a customer be expected to repeat themselves to one of your colleagues.
Ask all incoming calls if you can put them on hold until your current transaction is over (unless the call concerns the current transaction).
Politely ask all interruptions (including other customers) to kindly wait until your current transaction is over.

What is it not?

Leaving the customer contact point unmanned.
Having your back to the customer.
Hiding in the office!
Having newspapers or magazines on desks or counters.

Talking to colleagues while customers are present.
Ignoring customers.
Dismissing or invalidating customers' questions and concerns.
'I hear what you say but ...'
Justifying your actions.
Picking an argument.
Not deliberately making the situation worse.
Interrupting the customer.
Using inappropriate language.
Believing that customers are an irritation or inconvenience.

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Questions

- 1. Why would an organization like BAWC consider introducing a corporate service style?**
- 2. What difficulties might be encountered implementing a common service style across a global organization spanning different cultures?**
- 3. Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of the approach finally recommended to BAWC.**