

Virgin Atlantic increases service levels and booking conversion rates

Overview

Virgin Atlantic has continually broken new ground in airline passenger service since its launch in 1984, with a mission statement of building an airline “where people love to fly and where people love to work.”

Now the UK’s second largest long-haul airline, Virgin flies to 30 global destinations and continues to push innovation in all areas of customer service, holding true to their brand motto of “everyday pioneers.”

The Challenge

Virgin Atlantic differentiates strongly on customer experience, offering end-to-end differentiated service starting at the point of booking via their website. Offering this high level of service, while dealing with fluctuating levels of customer enquiries, by email in particular, had proved a significant challenge for the Virgin Atlantic team.

Email was proving to be an unsatisfactory service channel with the average query taking at least three emails and 48 hours to resolve. Virgin needed to find a way of improving this response time without increasing cost.

The airline also wanted to improve ticket sales conversion rates and catch website visitors who were dropping off before completing the booking process.

The Solution

LivePerson was appointed to implement online engagement across two areas of operation:

- Sales, where live chat was deployed within the booking funnel to increase booking conversion.
- Service, where the priority was deflecting enquiries from email to live chat.

Once installed in the sales funnel, LivePerson’s sophisticated business rules engine worked intelligently, identifying and prioritising higher revenue customers, determining precisely at which point to offer help during the booking process.

Engaging visitors online in real time at the end of the sales process wouldn’t drive results, as customers at that stage were already going to buy. The LivePerson team therefore deployed live chat only where it would drive incremental revenue or increase average order values. For instance, if a customer showed interest in cabin class, that visitor became a priority to whom assistance would be offered.

The system also located where customers became potentially confused or distressed, by detecting simple user-driven errors on

the route-planning engine. Live chat was then intuitively offered at that moment to rescue the sale.

LivePerson was additionally able to promote specific flights that Virgin Atlantic wanted prioritised for bookings, offering chat invitations to customers browsing those flights, ahead of others.

In the service area, by replacing the “click here to email” button with an invitation to chat on the contact page, visitors were proactively encouraged to use live chat as a first point of contact. The primary objective is not to reduce phone calls, but to convert email contact to live chat and resolve customer issues there and then.

“This year we had our first ever Live Chat Millionaire, a chat agent who was the first to personally achieve £1 million in sales via chat on our website, which was achieved in record time, 20% less time than a typical telephone agent.”

– John Giddings
General Manager
Virgin Atlantic Contact Centres,
UK and US

The Results

Overview: Online engagement has proved such a successful channel for customer service that Virgin Atlantic plans to increase the number of agents assigned to live chat at its contact centre.

“Chat has become very important to us, particularly in a crisis situation when the phones are ringing off the hook and the website can only offer limited information. In these instances, we can quickly move the maximum number of agents onto chat,” explains John Giddings, General Manager, Virgin Atlantic Contact Centres, UK and US.

Improved Conversion Rates: “Chat conversion rates have exceeded expectations,” says Giddings. “We had set a target for conversion of chat of 12-15%. On day one of the pilot, live chat achieved 18% conversion and has since reached a 23% conversion rate, never dropping below 18% since day one.” Customers who chat convert at nearly 3.5 times the rate of those who don’t.

The Results (cont'd)

Increase in Average Order Value: The average order values of online ticket sales are tracked for all visitors and since implementing live chat the average order value for those visitors who get help has increased by more than 15% over those that self serve.

Reduced Costs: The cost per chat is cheaper than both cost per phone call and cost per email. Eight chat agents can cover the work previously done by fifteen email agents, saving on labour costs.

Improved Customer Experience: The “here and now” resolution offered by LivePerson means that customers get their queries dealt with immediately, improving first contact resolution (FCR) scores and raising customer satisfaction (CSAT) scores to over 80%.

Better Resource Planning: Email volume was always a challenge, but at crisis times, Virgin Atlantic sometimes experiences 4,000 to 6,000 additional emails that require attention. With live chat, there is never a backlog as each enquiry can be fully resolved at first contact. The volume of email has significantly reduced and high email volumes can be cleared out in hours or overnight.

Staff Morale: Explains Giddings: “Live chat is a more positive way of working—it is potentially far less confrontational than phone contact and allows staff to chat amongst themselves, enabling them to assist each other with answering customer queries. It is altogether better for staff welfare and morale.”

Another unforeseen bonus of live chat is the increased option for agents to work from home. Since launching the pilot, some staff have already opted to homework two to three days per week, which has a positive effect on retention.

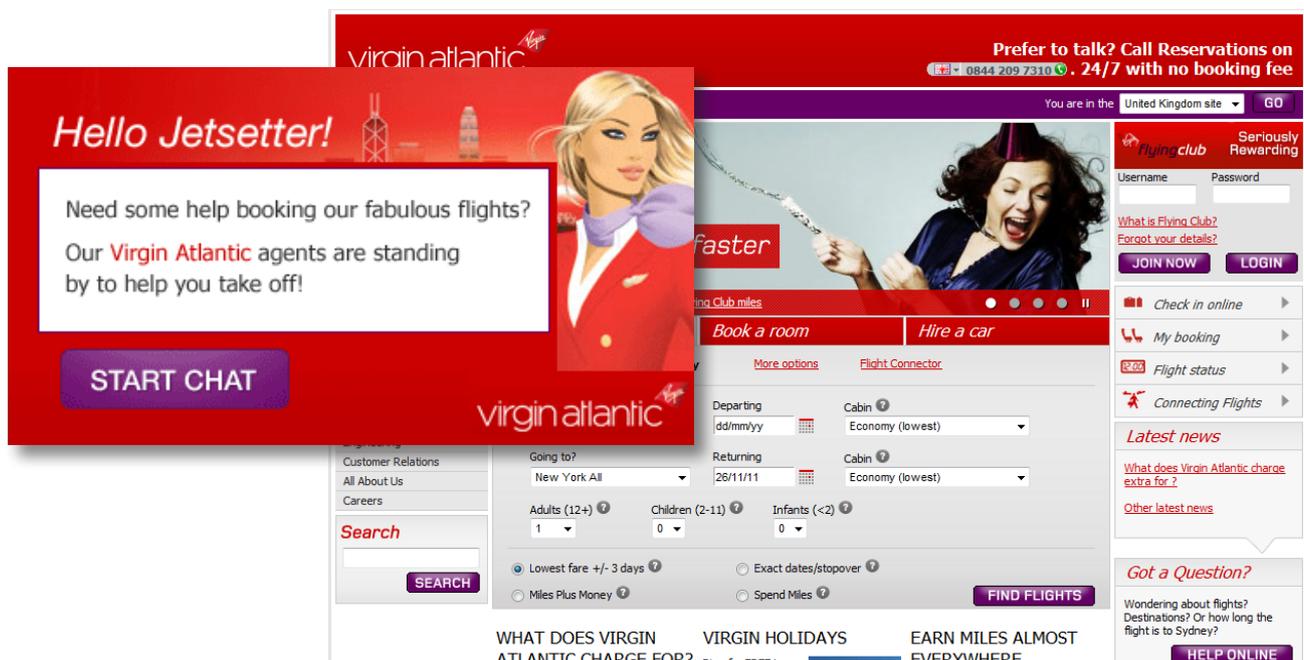
About LivePerson

LivePerson is the leading provider of online engagement solutions that connect businesses with consumers on the Web. LivePerson’s intelligent platform supports more than 8,500 companies, including Aviva, Barclays, BT, EDF, HSBC, O2, Sky and Vodafone, who rely on LivePerson to maximise the impact of the online channel.

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The screenshot displays the Virgin Atlantic website with a prominent live chat overlay. The chat window, titled "Hello Jetsetter!", contains the text: "Need some help booking our fabulous flights? Our Virgin Atlantic agents are standing by to help you take off!" and a "START CHAT" button. The background shows the website's navigation menu, a search bar, and a flight booking form. The booking form includes fields for "Going to?" (New York All), "Returning" (26/11/11), "Adults (12+)" (1), "Children (2-11)" (0), and "Infants (<2)" (0). It also features options for "Lowest fare +/- 3 days", "Exact dates/stopover", "Miles Plus Money", and "Spend Miles". The "FIND FLIGHTS" button is visible. On the right side, there is a "Flying Club" login section with "Username" and "Password" fields, and a "JOIN NOW" button. Below that, there are links for "Check in online", "My booking", "Flight status", and "Connecting Flights". A "Latest news" section is also present with a link to "What does Virgin Atlantic charge extra for?". At the bottom, there are links for "WHAT DOES VIRGIN ATLANTIC CHARGE FOR?", "VIRGIN HOLIDAYS", and "EARN MILES ALMOST EVERYWHERE".