

How not to take care of your customers

In response to customer complaints about United Airlines making their better customers jump through hoops to maintain the same level of benefits as they have had in the past, United Airlines posted this reply on their Twitter account-

[@ChrisHenry87](#) It will better identify & reward more fairly high value members, which in current program is inundated with many members. ML

? United (@united) [November 15, 2014](#)

For context, the airline industry is finally seeing full planes and improved profits (which may continue for awhile, as oil is forecast to remain at \$85 barrel, well below expectations). With the mergers of Delta/Northwest, United/Continental & USAir/AA, competition is nearly non-existent; they've discovered they can make a lot more money by flying full planes and potentially turning away some business than if they expand and have to consider lowering price to attract customers from one airline to another. It's a business, I get it, customers really don't have a choice so they can get away with it. About as un-like the bicycle business as you can possibly get.

So the airlines, or at least United, work at ways to reduce & eliminate benefits that used to be free. For the occasional flyer without elite status, that's already been done. Baggage fees, check in fees, call in fees, aisle & widow fees. Higher-level elites get those things, and more, for free. United thinks some of us ("us" because I am one of the mid-upper level elites) get more than we deserve, because we're not "High Value Flyers" (HVF being the industry short hand). Many, perhaps most of us, rose up through the ranks, slowly gaining elite status by sticking to one airline (United) during the "dark days" when United was lucky to get a plane out of the gate before it "went MX" (mechanical issue). We stayed with United during the "Summer of Hell" when pilots staged a months-long slowdown. We kept flying post-9/11 because we had things to do, places to go, and we weren't going to get caught up in the hysteria of fear that was gripping some of the country.

United marketed heavily to us, and we responded. We flew more. We paid more, because to maintain elite status you have to fly a lot of paid miles (award flights don't count) and we couldn't fly someone else who was cheaper or we'd miss our mileage target. Meanwhile the industry has been rapidly moving to an a la carte system where nearly all of the benefits we get, from being elites, are either available separately, for a fee, or come bundled with credit cards. Early boarding, special check-in lines, free checked bag.

Now, the airline says we "inundate" them. There are too many of us. We need to go away. Why? Why did they have to make it personal (using the word "inundate") instead of just say it's a business that has a responsibility to provide a maximum return to shareholders and take care of their employees?

It's just nuts. How can a company have such public disdain for their customers? Sure, a business has a responsibility to make sure its very best customers are very well taken care of. But at the expense of everyone else? What happens when business isn't so good?