

With Human Emulation, Alaska Airlines Soars



"While nearly all of the carriers were experiencing declines in satisfaction since 2007, Alaska Airlines has managed to improve... which is a particularly impressive feat in the current volatile industry environment." –Sam Thanawalla, Director, Global Hospitality & Travel¹

Next IT and Alaska Airlines have set a new standard for intelligent self-service, by creating a Virtual Employee that delivers the information travelers need in a language they can understand. Her name is 'Jenn' and this is her story.

A Legacy of Innovation

Since its humble beginnings in 1932, Alaska Airlines has grown from a small regional airline to one of the most respected in the nation, serving more than 17 million customers per year through a route system that spans more than 60 cities in three countries. Alaska's legacy of pioneering technology and customer innovation has made its history one of both aviation and industry firsts. Alaska was the first to sell tickets on the web, the first to use self-service kiosks and bar-coded boarding passes, and the first to offer home, office, and wireless check-in. In collaboration with Next IT, Alaska endeavored to be the first to introduce a Virtual Employee to the airline industry. In doing so, Alaska Airlines has attracted new customers to their site, creating the opportunity to easily direct both new and existing customers to online reservations and ticketing, web check-in, and assistance, resulting in call deflection and online adoption.

The Challenge

With the majority of its tickets purchased at alaskaair.com, Alaska's website has become the single most popular way users interact with the airline before traveling. Alaska envisioned using innovation to drive a better customer experience, offering users a personalized, engaging way to quickly and accurately connect them with the most relevant information on the website.

The evolving nature of Alaska's user-demand requires accurate answers and consistent resolutions in every interaction with every customer. To achieve their goal, Alaska needed a unique, differentiated solution as dynamic as Alaska's travelers. Alaska's leadership looked to Next IT to create a solution that would strengthen the online experience of Alaska' travelers, while streamlining the operational costs of complete traveler care.

¹J.D. Power & Associates - June 2008



*"I have a new favorite airline reservationist."
– David Grossman, USA Today*

"Ask Jenn a question on a wide range of topics, and you will get a fast, sensible response that saves you time." – Joe Sharkey, New York Times

The Next IT Approach

Next IT set out to meet Alaska's challenges by creating a virtual travel expert who would deliver quick and accurate information to Alaska's web-users and serve as a brand ambassador for Alaska Airlines. The solution? A friendly, Virtual Employee named Jenn.



Jenn is the culmination of the best of Alaska Airlines, infused with the DNA of Alaska's most elite practices, employees, information, and resources. Jenn engages with Alaska's web users through an organic, conversational medium, uncovers their intent, and consistently resolves the user's needs.

Jenn's ability to emulate the values and positioning of Alaska Airlines was achieved through a dynamic and collaborative process. In partnership with Alaska's brand and subject matter experts, Next IT conducted multiple focus groups and test sessions throughout Jenn's creation to ensure that every aspect of user-engagement was representative of Alaska's commitment to excellence. From her look and personality to the depth of her intelligence, Jenn was developed and implemented to reflect the best of Alaska Airlines at all times.

Immediate Results

On February 7, 2008, Alaska Airlines and Next IT introduced Jenn to the world, offering the very first online virtual travel expert. Since Jenn's introduction, she has garnered the advertising equivalent of over 1 million dollars in media impressions through widespread press coverage. Sources such as the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and *USA Today* responded to Jenn's personality, usability, and innovation, driving users to www.alaskaair.com and reaffirming Alaska's standing as a technological pioneer.

Jenn has exceeded targeted milestones for shifting customer service to the web, reducing call center call volumes, and increasing customer engagement—far sooner than anticipated. Within her first year, Jenn deflected calls so efficiently from call centers, by assisting and navigating customers through online bookings, ticketing, and web check-in, that the need for an online "live chat" function was no longer necessary and was removed from the site in October 2008.



"Next IT has been a true partner through the process. They continue to bring us ideas about how Jenn can help our customers accomplish more, with ease, on our website. A lot of companies are making claims, but Next IT is the real deal." – Steve Jarvis, VP, Sales, Marketing, and Customer Experience, Alaska Airlines

Next Steps

With over 3.2 million questions answered so far, the impact on Alaska's web users has been immediate, proving ActiveAgent's effectiveness in a multi-channel business environment. Alaska Airlines and Next IT anticipate a perpetual increase in Jenn's success in proportion to visibility expansion and technology optimization. They continue to collaborate and explore deeper ways to utilize Next IT's technology across more of Alaska's service landscape and expand Jenn's presence at www.alaskaair.com.

About Alaska Airlines

Together Alaska Airlines and sister carrier Horizon Air serve over 80 cities through an expansive network in Alaska, the Lower 48, Hawaii, Canada, and Mexico. For more news and information, visit the Alaska Airlines/Horizon Air Newsroom at alaskaair.com/newsroom.

About Next IT

Next IT is a software company that was founded on the principle that technology should be conversational. Our work allows people to interact with technology using everyday language—and we've put it to work for clients including Aetna, Alaska Airlines, BECU, Continental Airlines, Gonzaga University, and the U.S. Army, helping them reach new levels of digital customer service.

For more information on Next IT Human Emulation Software and Ask Jenn, please email Info@NextIT.com or visit www.NextIT.com.