

Virtually at Your Service

This month I've asked Steve Jarvis to tell you about another innovation that is blazing the way toward easier travel. As Alaska Airlines' vice president of marketing, sales and customer experience, Steve's got his finger on the pulse of our customers.

—Bill Ayer, Chairman and CEO



Bill Ayer
Chairman and CEO

“Do I check my moose antlers?” “Can I buy my double bass a seat?” “Should I take my swim trunks to Barrow, Alaska?” Our employees answer these, and hundreds of other less oddball questions, daily. And lately they've had some help.

Jenn, Alaska Airlines' virtual assistant, is at your service 24/7 from her Web-based corner office on the home page of alaskaair.com. She's what the high-tech world calls an “avatar”—a computer-generated image of a person.



Some of the employees who bring “Jenn” to you.

But computerized hardly describes Jenn. Her warm, friendly voice and hint of humor is modeled after the caring, professional employees Alaska Airlines is renowned for. And her repertoire of answers comes from years of real employees talking to you, our customers.

Jenn is the equivalent of “Dear Abby” for Alaska Airlines. Her wisdom is sought by frequent and first-time fliers alike who type questions on their computer screens. Jenn responds immediately with spoken and written answers. She also provides links to further information if you want to learn more.

Alaska Airlines is the first domestic carrier to use the technology, which has drawn

raves for its ease of use and friendliness. Jenn has answered 3.4 million questions during nearly 1.5 million chat sessions with customers. That's about 7,000 questions a day. Topics run the gamut, with the most common involving checked-baggage policies, purchasing or changing tickets, Mileage Plan awards and seat assignments. Then there are the less common, such as checking moose antlers.

Besides Jenn's helpfulness, the greatest benefit she provides is access to information. Ask her, “What happens if my flight gets canceled?” and she takes you to a page on alaskaair.com that outlines our Customer Service Commitment Policy. Ask “What can I carry onboard?” and Jenn displays a list of allowable items. She even links you to the Transportation Security Administration Website.

Jenn's voice is provided by longtime Alaska Airlines employee Theresa Miller, who is also the pleasant voice you hear when you call 1-800-ALASKAAIR. Miller and her co-workers at alaskaair.com helped bring Jenn to life, using human-recognition technology called “Active Agent,” pioneered by Spokane, Washington-based Next IT.

“Ask Jenn” follows a proud tradition of innovation at Alaska Airlines. We were the first U.S. carrier to sell tickets on the Internet and the first to let you check in and print your boarding pass via the Web.

Last year, we launched a

“Low Fare Calendar” on alaskaair.com that enables you to find advertised specials and low prices without having to search by individual dates. We developed a similar “Award Finder” calendar for online shopping for Mileage Plan travel awards. And we're testing a project to let customers pass through airport security and board flights using electronic boarding passes on Web-enabled cell phones and PDAs.

Customers are also testing equipment to surf the Web from the comfort of their seats on one specially equipped aircraft, as part of Alaska Airlines' plan to roll out inflight wireless broadband across our fleet.

Thanks to Jenn, Alaska Airlines recently took a bow as a 2008 InfoWorld 100 award winner, putting us in the company of America's most innovative corporations. The award recognizes our leadership in using technology to make travel more customer-friendly. Rest assured, though, that technology will never replace the industry-leading service you receive from our employees.

Even so, making travel easier is what Jenn is all about. She's developed quite a following—and even a few admirers who've strayed a bit to ask: “What's your favorite meal?” “Do you have children?” And, “Would you like to go out with me?”

In case you're wondering, wild Alaska salmon is Jenn's cuisine of choice. No, she doesn't have children, although Jenn's virtual dog, Denali, would like a playmate. And, no, she's just too busy answering questions to date.

Thanks for flying with us.

—Steve Jarvis

