

“Airline Innovations”



Weekly Learnings 07 / 2024

Finnair announced plans to weigh passengers before a flight. This got huge backlash. I looked at airline innovations over the years and here's what I learnt:

1. All airlines are about using technology to enhance customer experience while reducing cost. Technology, Consumer Experience and Cost are the holy trinity for an airline.
2. Most airlines started as airmail services. Airmail services were in operation before 1900s via balloons. The availability of spare military aircraft after World War 1 led to a surge in air mail and passenger planes.
3. Texas International was the first to introduce the airline frequent flyer program in 1979. Western Airlines introduced their frequent flyer program that became the basis of the Delta airlines program when they acquired Western Airlines.
4. Qantas was the first to introduce business class in 1979. Scandinavian Airlines introduced in 1981 a full Euro class which meant separate business class check in, separate lounge etc. So, the concept of the business class is 40 years old, and it has moved from reclining seats to flat beds to wide beds. Qantas is also testing Project Sunrise which is their 20-hour flight from USA to the Australian East coast. This is a full day travel with a seat pitch of 83 cms and starts operating in April 2025.
5. Ryanair toyed with the idea of a pay for toilet and dropped it against a backlash. Their argument was removing the two toilets gives them 6 additional seats!
6. The standing saddle seat is an innovation being discussed. The seat pitch is 23 cms while the minimum for safety is 28 cms. The seat manufacturer said, "this seat is like riding a horse for a few hours", now why would you want to do that?
7. Airlines is the leading industry to use AI. PanAm were the first to computerise the passenger reservation system with a project done by IBM in the 1960s. Melbourne and Lyon airports are testing an airport chatbot, which combines flight information, parking spaces, food choices etc.
8. British Airways plans to use AI to improve customer experience.
9. FK airport has introduced a robot manicurist, picture attached, that paints your nails in under 10 minutes.
10. American Airlines plans to use Machine learning to reduce gate planning time from 4 hours to under 3 minutes. The staff released will be deployed for customer satisfaction and this will save millions of litres of air fuel.

11. Lost baggage costs in a weak year like 2020 was valued at \$600 million. Airlines are trying to get this right with AI. Etihad is trying self-check-in where cameras memorise your luggage and deliver it to you, thus doing away with luggage tags.
12. The good thing in this industry is that it is governed by very strict safety regulations and hence you will not see untested innovations in the air!!

Believe it or Not: Pakistan International Airlines trained Emirates airlines when they started!!

Shiv

www.shivshivakumar.com

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