

# British airways – a pr case study

Business



INTRODUCTION: It was time when British Airways showed the world the future of travel with the opening of Heathrow Airports spectacular new Terminal 5. Opening on the 27th of March 2008, inaugurated by Queen Elizabeth (the second), the terminal completely failed in the first two weeks of its operation.

Insufficient staff training and testing, coupled with a disruption in the Terminals IT systems led to around 500 flights being cancelled.

SEGMENTED ANALYSIS (What went wrong): 1. Logistics and Planning: Rather than properly training the Bag Handlers and staff members, they were simply shown around the whole Terminal.

Where in weeks ago before the terminal was inaugurated they should have been trained with trail runs. Due to lack of training they found it difficult to navigate through the Huge building causing inconvenience to the passengers.

Duties should have been delegated, and training should have been conducted in a specialized manner with people doing only their assigned tasks. 2. Technical and Human Errors: a. The computer systems didn't recognize staff ID's b. Doors meant to be open were locked.

c. 17 out of the 18 terminal lifts were jammed d. The transit system meant to move passengers broke down. . Carousels, escalators, walkways and electronic screens all failed. f.

Baggage handling system (capable of handling up to 12000 bags an hour) crashed by 11 am All of the above mentioned problems occurred because the whole terminal had never been tested in a “ live” terminal situation.

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There was lot of miscommunication from one department to another also technicians were not alert as to what were the terminal requirements. 3.

Lack of leadership and Hubris: One week before its openings BAA declared “ We have a world class baggage system that is going to run perfectly on day one”.

Despite the hitches reported by the baggage staff, the management was complacent and over looked all technical problems. Also the BA office that should have sorted out all such concerns were shut on the last week.

The management shouldn't have been so slug and unnerved about these technical faults. Everybody just seemed jubilant about the opening of the terminal, there by discarding chances of any problems that might occur. In fact the management should have cross-checked and re-run the whole terminal to make sure nothing went wrong specially after making tall claims in Public. 4.

Low Morale and Goodwill: Staff complained that morale in the last few months has been very low.

Whenever BA got into any mess the people helped out. But with a mistake of such degree even its goodwill evaporated. On the day, disoriented baggage handlers and stressed ground staff became surly and unhelpful as they didn't know how to handle the situation and the problems kept unfolding. The management shouldn't have let the problem reach such a level. There was a clear communication and gap and the Staff didn't know how to react and just gave up under pressure as they didn't consider it their fault.

. Lack of Communication & Crises Management: BA decided to disappear right when the problems were beginning. There was a total breakdown in communication both internally and externally. There was nobody to help with announcement or information, monitors weren't working, nobody to help with baggage. Only 2 out of the 26 information desks were operational. Passengers arrived but the flights were delayed, others were told their flights were cancelled when they were scheduled.

There was chaos all around with nobody knowing what to do. The management at BA should have led by the front on such an occasion.

Even if things were going the other way, they should have been there trying to find a solution instead of exiting via the back door, as they were in charge of handling any crises what so ever. This was one of the biggest drawbacks.  
1.

What advice would you give BA and BAA right now? Shutting T5 for a few days and then restoring operations is not an option as the Terminal is running and it would be a major problem, shutting all activities. Thus the management of BA and BAA should collectively stand up and 1stly publicly announce all the faults, so the customers know as to what went wrong.

Then section by section they should start rolling work. Which means, shut down a particular section first, fix it up and move on to another. There by not totally shutting operations.

The Baggage systems should be fixed first, after which the elevators etc should be fixed. Also they should make sure that they have an active workforce. Information Desks should be restored with people communicating  
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exact details of the situation. The staff should be spoken to by the management themselves. It's important their morale is boosted.

Everybody should be assigned particular tasks and all the queries of the staff should be cleared.

Communication both internally and externally have to be clear. Also as the improvements happen, they should be conveyed to its customers with a due apology and a guarantee that nothing as such would happen again. 2. What do they need to learn from this crises? a.

Staff inputs should be taken into consideration, and have to be duly dwelled upon as they are the people who run the terminal. b. The staff has to be informed about everything at all point of time. Internal Communication is very necessary. Also it should always be put across in a very positive and strategized away.

Every problem needs to be conveyed, how it is conveyed should be thought about.

c. The management should not shy away from its responsibilities. BA has a reputation to live up to. What they communicate and how they communicate is important. They just can hide when a crises rises up.

There by next time around, their PR and Communication strategies should be in place to match every problem. d. A check should be kept on operations at all times. Also technicians should be on alert if any system fails. A contingency plan should always be ready with management. e.

Also all necessary information should be conveyed to its customers and the media at the right point of time. The information Desk should be active and fully aware of every situation. 3. What do they need to do to restore their reputation and put things right with their customers? The opening of T5 was a huge embarrassment to BA and a Humiliation for BAA. What should have been an opportunity to rehabilitate Heathrow as one of the world's greatest airports turned into a nightmare of Delays, passenger confusion and chaos.

Five days on, 250 flights were cancelled and there was still a backlog of 15,000 baggage's. a.

Firstly, The BA and BAA collectively should face the crises and at the earliest solve all technical and human problems. b. Since everything is already out in the open, they should publicly apologize and count on its built brand name to work for them.

It has a reputation and everybody makes mistakes. So rather than shying away, they should openly ask for another chance. c. All its customers should be compensated. Free air tickets, discounts, stay and living vouchers etc should be given to its passengers on case to case basis. d.

A whole new PR strategy should be employed, which caters to image building and customer satisfaction. . Communication should be opened, the media and the public should be fully aware of why the crises happened and how they are being corrected to now suiting its customers. f. A whole new Advertising and Marketing strategy should be launched to repair the damaged reputation and attracting its customers back.

g. Heathrow Airport is an integral airport, also BA has goodwill. That should be taken into account to re-construct its current mistake. h. Management should publicly and personally apologize to regain customer confidence.

This are my findings and interpretations of this particular case study.