



Virgin Atlantic Airways – Induction programme

Setting the scene

Virgin Atlantic is the second largest long haul airline in the UK and the third largest European carrier over the North Atlantic. They are co-owned by the Virgin Group and Singapore Airlines. The Headquarters is based in the UK, in Crawley near London Gatwick Airport, with eight overseas offices, US, Caribbean, South Africa, Hong Kong, Tokyo, Shanghai, Delhi and Lagos. Virgin Atlantic operates more than 26 aircraft. Virgin possesses a particularly strong brand and it is vital for the maintenance of that brand that all employees understand and live the ethos of Virgin. The purpose of the induction training is to ensure that new employees understand Virgin's unique ethos and are instilled with a sense of excitement, belonging and pride in a successful and unique business.

Maximising the return on the fixed cost of the business, primarily fleet fixed costs, is a significant business pressure and it is important that new employees understand the nature of these fixed costs.

The business need for learning

Virgin Atlantic is a highly successful and expanding airline. Recruitment for new jobs and new roles and for new overseas locations is a constant requirement. In addition the nature of the long haul industry means a rapid turnover of staff; particularly cabin crew. On an annual basis Virgin Atlantic recruits 1,000 new starters and there was a requirement to shorten the time it takes before these new recruits are in post. The previous 2-day induction programme was run on a weekly basis. All new entrants, irrespective of their global location, will attend this course in the UK. For UK recruits this happens on their first day of joining; for those overseas it may be some time after their starting date. Virgin Atlantic needed to shorten the time in face-to-face training at Crawley; focusing it more at the “you’ve made a great decision to join, now go and be like us”. Those in overseas locations should receive training in the brand and its ethos immediately upon joining. The strategy of training trainers for overseas locations was considered. This was rejected on grounds of cost and a potential dilution of quality. For a company that relies on Brand strength it is essential that this is maintained, hence the requirement to train staff in the Head Office, with the additional benefit that every Virgin employee has been to Head Office.

Subsidiary benefits are:



Introducing Web-delivered content to new recruits encourages a 'mind set' of obtaining information through the Web. This has encouraged the use of the internal VAA Intranet. This is the main source of information for staff and needs to be encouraged.

Delegates now arrive for face-to-face training with a common knowledge level maximising the effectiveness of the 1-day course.

The innovation and quality of the product has served to strengthen in recruits minds the key brand value of innovation and the need to deliver services to both internal and external customers in novel and engaging ways.

The learning solution

The product is a highly media-rich Web-delivered programme, available for new recruits to use as soon as recruitment has been confirmed. Future employees from around the World are able to access the content via initially both Broadband and Dial-up connections during the period when they are waiting to join the Company and therefore keen and motivated to find out more about their future employer. The structure of the programme follows the Mission Statement of VAA; to grow a profitable airline that people love to fly and people love to work for. The remaining two parts of the programme are the history of Virgin and what recruits can expect on their first day and subsequently. The programme includes interactive interviews with the CEO, interactive time lines, a game to match Richard Branson's successful first flight and a chance to see different sectors of the business and what happens and finally a chance to hear from existing staff from around the World.

Planning and implementing the solution

The induction programme was Virgin's first excursion into e-learning. The case for saving time in recruitment and providing material to recruits in advance of the joining date proved to be an argument that the Board were willing to endorse. It was a pilot approach to e-learning, which encouraged senior management to try it out.

The project manager established a project group with representatives from sections and departments across the Company; specifically brand manager, representatives of the contact centre, the cabin crew training, engineering training and from recruitment. This involved all the significant key players. VAA contracted design and development to Epic who were considered to have the appropriate management and skill set to deliver to Virgin's exacting standards.

The principal content of the e-learning is drawn from the existing 2-day induction programme with three significant elements added. The programme includes interviews with existing staff from different departments and different regional locations. There is an explanation of the fleet fixed costs, which are unique to airlines. There is an explanation of the Company's reward and motivation scheme; referred to as the Hero Scheme. This includes video segments of staff receiving the substantial rewards available and this section is updated regularly to reflect the current heroes in Virgin.



Three versions were made; for broadband, for dial up and for CDROM distribution.

Business Benefits

- Delivery of learning immediately on joining to all new recruits
- In some cases learning is completed before recruits join
- Saving in cost of delivery as the airline has expanded
- Delivery of a 100% consistent message on ethos, culture and brand
- An e-learning culture is established with all new recruits which results in an increased use of the Virgin Intranet (the main channel for direct staff communication)
- Enhanced reputation of the training function; "everyone is incredible proud of this course"
- Increased organisational confidence in expanding e-learning.



Good Practice Ideas

- A cross functional project team representing all interested parties
- Actual staff members were interviewed for the research and then used with recorded interviews inserted in the programme. This asked staff to explain and give examples of how they “lived the brand”
- Video message from the CEO
- Delivering induction training before recruits join
- Directors of departments and heads of sections have asked for the e-learning to be made available to work experience students.
- Design for maintenance and updating: specify with the production company which parts of the e-learning are likely to be updated
- Pick SMEs carefully so that project time is not taken up with refereeing subject matter input

Points to consider for the future

Encapsulating learning content for electronic delivery makes senior management pay more attention to content. A senior Director might not concern themselves with what a trainer may say or deliver in a classroom environment, they will pay more attention to the content of e-learning. This is a welcome rise in the profile of e-learning but must be allowed for in any project plan.

Although this product is delivered only in English Virgin are developing multi-lingual versions of new programmes

All recruitment is initiated through the Virgin website and this e-learning provide high quality support.

Early in the roll out Virgin underestimated the number of support calls that would be made when learners accessed the e-learning on-line at home. Over the last year the need for telephone support has dropped to almost zero. When the e-learning was launched in 20XX 60% of users were on broadband this has now increased to 82%. The dialup version has been abandoned and Virgin rely on a broadband version and CD ROMs.

Broadband availability and quality at home in the UK is better than in the office.