

Brunch over Lunch: A Review of British Airways' Cost-cutting Measures



Source: Unsplash (2022)

Background

With a history of more than a century, British Airways (BA) is the flag carrier of the United Kingdom, operating to more than 200 destinations worldwide (Routes, n.d.). In past decades, the airline has faced criticism for inconsistent reliability and service quality, but its recent cost-cutting measures have created even more controversy.

In its latest cost-cutting strategy, BA replaced lunch service on some long-haul flights with brunch for business and first-class passengers (The CFO, 2024). Instead of the original lunch menu, passengers on long-haul flights departing between 9:30 am and 11:29 am are shown a smaller brunch brochure. First-class customers who would previously have been offered a range of main course options, including grilled lamb rack, chicken Wellington, grilled halibut, or vegetarian kofta, are now served prawn salad, poached egg, and pancakes (The Telegraph, 2024).

BA's brunch policy sparked vibrant debate soon after its implementation, as passengers and industry partners worry the change symbolizes an unhealthy shift in priorities from customer experience to favouring the airline's bottom line (The CFO, 2024). This concern was further substantiated by reports that flight attendants are told in training to stop apologizing to customers over complaints of poor meal and amenity options (Leff, 2024). In another training exercise, flight attendants are given a price list of food items and asked to assemble an economy class meal without exceeding a £5 budget (Klint, 2024).

Despite these criticisms, BA's financial performance has improved, with the airline reporting growing profits at the end of 2024 and announcing a £7bn turnaround investment in aircraft, cabins, and systems upgrades (The Guardian, 2024). It is believed that BA adopted cost-cutting measures like the brunch policy out of necessity, and may now be willing to realign service levels as its finances improve.

Challenges

Some attribute the brunch policy to BA's adoption of offer-order technology, which modifies service offerings based on data but has resulted in gaps in understanding customer preferences (The CFO, 2024). While the shift to brunch may reflect a broader trend towards cost efficiency, it overlooks the nuanced needs of high-paying customers. Additionally, logistical problems have arisen, such as brunch being served as late as 1 pm for flights departing later in the morning, which is not ideal for passengers expecting lunch (The Telegraph, 2024).

Following these events, concern is growing among loyalty members that the airline may further erode the premium experience with more cost-cutting measures in the future (PYOK, 2025). While BA seeks to enhance profitability through cost-cutting, it risks losing loyal customers to competitors.

Discussion Questions

1. In what ways might the brunch policy impact customer satisfaction and loyalty?
2. How do flight attendant training changes reflect BA's shifting priorities?
3. Should airlines prioritize financial performance over customer experience? Why or why not?
4. What changes would BA make to the brunch policy to reduce friction of implementation and customer complaints?
5. What alternative cost-cutting measures could British Airways consider for in-flight meal services that might be less controversial than the brunch policy?

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Keywords

- Airline
- In-flight service
- Cost-cutting
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- Guest experience
- Meal Policy