

CIELO FastLane Customer Service



Source: Unsplash (2022)

Background

Nowadays, many airlines have turned to digital channels and online chatbots to relieve the cost and pressure on their call centers. Yet, getting help from AI has often led to customer frustration in high-stress or high-complexity situations (PhocusWire, 2024). A survey by TP Business Insights Lab (2023) reveals that 77% of travelers still prefer speaking to a human customer service agent. However, problems like long wait times and limited availability of human agents have made it difficult for customers to get the help they require.

With the mission to keep "humans (and empathy) at the center of customer service," tech company Cielo developed a FastLane product that allows airline customers to get help faster from a human agent by paying a small fee or using loyalty points to skip to the front of the call line (Cielo, n.d.). The founder of the company believes that even though chatbots are the cheaper option and can be useful for operational efficiency, there is value in offering the option to speak to a human as a premium service, citing that Zoom and many online travel agents have offered priority customer service for years to their subscribers (PhocusWire, 2024).

Moreover, while call centers play a huge part in an airline's cost structure, Cielo emphasizes helping companies "turn their call center into a profit center" (Cielo, n.d.). By monetizing priority access and human customer service, FastLane helps airlines generate extra revenue or even profit from their call center service, which could then be used to fund the operation of the call center.

Challenges

Despite the innovative approach of Cielo's FastLane product, several challenges remain. One significant concern is the willingness of customers to pay for priority access to human agents, as not all travelers may find value in this premium service. Additionally, there is the potential issue of multiple customers opting for this service at the same time, leading to questions about

how to fairly manage the queue—who should be put at the front, and how to ensure that those who paid extra do not end up waiting again. This raises the broader concern about the effectiveness of the system if it results in similar delays, thereby undermining the very purpose of offering expedited support.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do many travelers still prefer speaking to a human agent despite the availability of AI chatbots?
2. How can airlines balance the cost-saving benefits of using AI chatbots with the need to provide empathetic and effective human customer service?
3. How could airlines use data from FastLane usage to improve overall customer service?
4. What alternative solutions could airlines explore to improve customer service efficiency and satisfaction without relying solely on paid priority access?

References

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Keywords

- Airline
- Chatbots
- Customer service
- Priority access
- Human Touch
- Customer experience