

Creating Quality Customer Service

Keeping customers comfortable and loyal is an easier said than done job, requiring an FBO be customer service-focused from top to bottom.

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Complimentary water is offered to guests as they get off their plane at Desert Jet.

Desert Jet

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Customer service, it's an important aspect for any business and what it means changes from industry to industry. For a hotel, it may mean the warm greeting of the concierge. A restaurateur may prioritize cleanliness and timeliness for their customers – and for an FBO, they need to take all of this, and more, into consideration.

Roman Mendez, general manager, Desert Jet Center, said for him, customer service is about going above and beyond expectations.

“The way we define good customer service is great customer service,” said Mendez. “It is not just about having the car ready and helping with bags. Those are helpful services we will always provide. It's about going to the next level, above and beyond what is expected and making sure that things go along without any hiccups for the customer. When customers fly into our FBO, they are immediately greeted

planeside by friendly and attentive staff offering water and assistance. On warmer days, we make sure to have plenty of cold water available for guests to take. Our team cars are ready and waiting, cooled off or warmed up for a comfortable ride to their destination. Great customer service is paying attention to the needs of the individual customer.”

Desert Jet CEO Jared Fox agreed, knowing your customer is the first step to providing quality service.

“I always say it's a mix between a five-star hotel and an FBO here and that's what we're trying to do. Really anticipatory by knowing our customer, knowing what their needs are going to be before they even know it in some cases,” Fox said.

Located at the Jacqueline Cochran Regional Airport, Desert Jet Center serves the Palm Springs, Calif., area which Fox said gives the FBO a unique clientele, with returning customers flying in seasonally for the winter months and making Desert Jet their home.

“This is their home base so they're in and out,” Fox added. “It's one of the things I fell in love with the FBO business is the interactions with the people that we get to see on a daily basis.”

Knowing the customer is also key for Texas Jet’s Customer Service Manager Holly Hopkins, who said the FBO’s approach to customer service is defined by the customer themselves.

“Good customer service is what our customers say it is,” said Hopkins. “Don’t assume you’re doing a good job. Ask your customers what they think of your service, safety and facilities.”

Feedback for Desert Jet Center is a critical parameter in deciding how they run their operations or make changes, with the goal of creating a memorable experience. Mendez said their main source of feedback comes from talking with their customers. Some customers also prefer to leave online reviews and referrals.

“Receiving feedback is the best thing. We get a lot of compliments, so we know what's working. If we get compliments on something, we really push that forward. If we get feedback that we need to improve on something, we want to work on improving those areas. We want our customers to know their feedback is important to us, and that we take it to heart,” Mendez said.

Offline, Fox said his ultimate goal is to provide an experience that people can’t help but talk about.

“We know that's a tough ask. People are more likely to share bad experiences than they are good experiences so we really have to provide a special experience, a good, positive experience for them to start telling their friends and family, which many do and we're seeing that,” continued Fox.

And delivering that memorable experience returns to providing their guest customized experiences tailored to their individual needs.

“We remembered a grandkid's birthday. We remembered an anniversary. A dog's name. Those types of things really go a long way so the goals that we're setting is to make sure that we take every arrival, every customer interaction and treat it as a special event,” Mendez described.

The attention to detail has garnered Desert Jet Center the most reviews at the airport and Palm Springs area, Mendez said. In-person word-of-mouth and referrals have also shown that the FBO’s approach is a winning one.

“The greatest delight we have, and we see it all the time, is when somebody shows up and they'll mention another one of our customers and say John or Jill or Lisa said we have to try Desert Jet,” Fox said. “You can advertise, you can do a lot of things, but the experience that the existing customer base

has, and then when they go out of their way to share it with their friends and family, that's the ultimate compliment for us.”

Taking Time to Train

Providing exceptional customer service doesn't happen in a vacuum. It takes a well-trained team from top to bottom to make it happen.

“Initial and recurrent training are vital to providing great customer service. Our people are trained to be thorough when they're taking down information for a customer's arrival. We help our customers think about things they may have forgotten,” said Hopkins. “Texas Jet's training focuses on safety and service. We have achieved IS-BAH Stage III registration and it's crucial that all of our standard operating procedures are followed 100 percent of the time. All of our employees also go through initial and recurrent training with the NATA Safety 1st Training Center.”

Mendez said the fundamentals of their training begins with NATA safety training, which helps get those new to aviation up to speed, and Desert Jet Center is also the only IS-BAH registered, and NATA Safety 1st certified FBO in the Desert Southwest Region, he added. Then on top of that, there's personal training by Mendez, his leads and the FBO managers.

“I've been around a lot of people that have great experience and I've picked apart some of the things that I loved, put it together and I've trained my team around that,” Mendez said.

The FBO also has a customer service specialist who spends time with their guest service representatives to make sure that they understand how to deliver five-star service – what details to pay attention to, what things to remember, etc.

“We also take part in third-party customer training. We encourage our general managers and other executive team members to pursue programs like the NBAA Certified Aviation Manager (CAM) Program or to participate in training and educational sessions when we attend the NBAA conferences and other industry events,” said Fox.

Chris Little, chief marketing officer, Desert Jet, said that teams are cross trained to give them an understanding of the different roles at the FBO.

“Cross training gives FBO team members the experience on how to do various tasks. It also provides them the opportunity to understand the importance of each role and how it contributes overall to the customer experience,” Little said. “The team also takes part in a Four Seasons type of concierge training so they can bring a higher level of service to their customers. And not just to their customers but also to their team members. That is key here in this environment. We're very team oriented so the level of service and care that we provide to our customers we also provide to one another.”

With training there also comes the technology to help and enhance it, such as an investment in a CRM concierge program.

“What that allows us to do is build profiles around every customer, so we understand what their likes and dislikes are. We get to know them on a more intimate level. We understand what some special events they may have in their lives are, so we can plan around that and make that special for them,” Mendez described.

Recently, Desert Jet Center opened its new 32,500 square foot facility, which houses not only the FBO, but also their charter and maintenance departments. The facility features an observation deck that

overlooks the airport, air-conditioned hangar, conference rooms, shower, kitchen, fully stocked amenities bar and a pilot's lounge, among other customer-centric features.

"A big thing we wanted to do is to make this a one-stop shop for all of our customers," said Fox.

"Desert Jet Center is the only full-service executive FBO in the entire valley, offering more than ground, fuel, and storage hangar services. We also provide onsite aircraft maintenance and detailing services. Our teams work collaboratively so customers have quick access to extended services when needed," added Little. "That's part of our anticipatory service. Our customers know there's no need to go elsewhere for other aircraft services; we can provide the resources they need right here."

Customers and COVID

Like it has the rest of the world, the COVID-19 pandemic has changed customer service and what guests to an FBO may be looking for with health at the top of their mind.

"Our customers have been very appreciative with the procedures we've put in place to protect them as well as our employees. We require temperature taking, hand sanitizing and mask wearing inside our FBO and we have extensive disinfecting policies that our employees perform 24/7," explained Hopkins.

One of the immediate steps Desert Jet took was to provide complimentary cabin disinfection. A step taken not only for safety concerns, but it also helped set Desert Jet Center apart from others during the initial, turbulent onset of the pandemic.

"That was very important to the limited amount of traffic that was out there. Knowing that there's an FBO that's taking the initiative to protect the health of passengers, crews and employees on their own. We started offering complimentary cabin disinfection before it actually became a bit more popular with some of the other FBOs," Little explained.

COVID impacted the personal touches Desert Jet Center employees were used to, such as no longer being able to shake hands, but as new guidelines come out, Mendez said, traffic is again beginning to pick up and people are beginning to grow more at ease with traveling. In the long-term, Mendez thinks this pandemic creates an opportunity for business and general aviation to work closely together to provide a healthier, safer, and reliable means of transportation for business and personal travel alike.

"We have definitely seen an increase in traffic. And I think overall travelers are feeling very comfortable with flying into Desert Jet Center. They have seen the steps we are taking and protocols we've put in place to ensure a healthy and safe environment for their travels," he said.