

Festive flights: who soared and who was grounded on social media

By Nick Paul

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The festive season is a busy time for airlines and with passenger numbers spiking so significantly, the number of people trying to reach the airlines for assistance also naturally sees a sharp uptick. Not only this but as ticket prices climb with the increase in demand, a marketing battleground starts to develop with airlines clamouring to fill seats and steal market share.

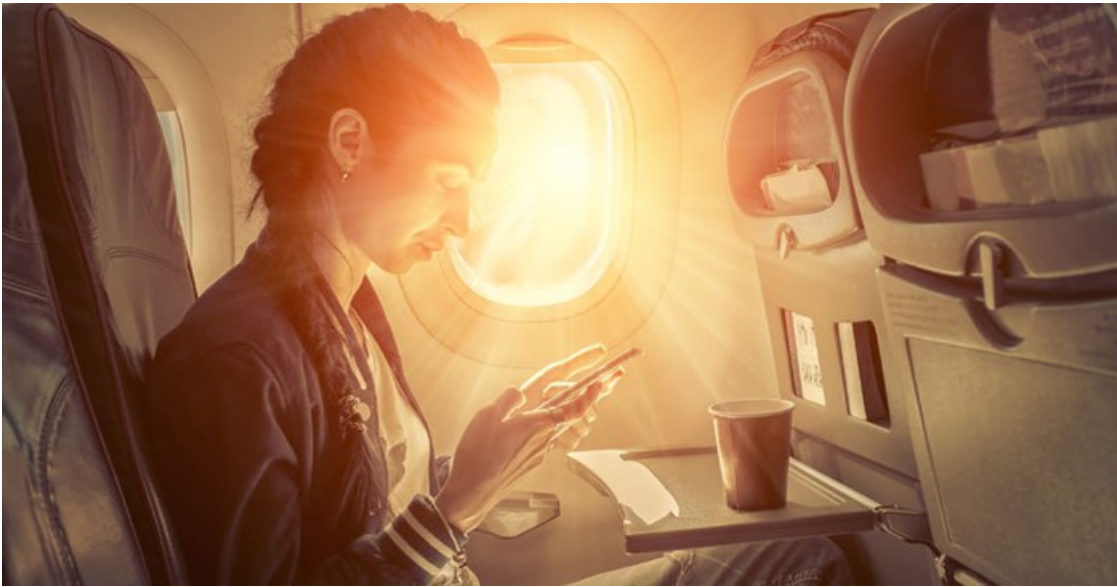


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Who saw themselves soar?

If engagement on Facebook is anything to go by, it looks like Mango was a clear winner of this battle over the summer holidays. According to a recent [social media report by Unmetric](#), they gathered in excess of 110,000 engagements over that period compared to their closest competitors SAA and FlySafair, who each hovered closer to the 20,000 mark.

Now while engagements by no means mean sales, they do give an indication of the kind of share of voice a brand has on social media. And Mango sure did steal most of that pie with 65% of comments in the airline industry and 50% of all shares, the latter the more significant stat in that it gives the brand free word-of-mouth marketing.



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While Mango may have been the winners in terms of engagement, the most loved airline in South Africa this festive season was arguably newcomer, FlySafair. They saw the highest percentage of positive sentiment from fan engagements at 32%, indicating that while they may not dominate the social media space they're doing a lot right behind the scenes, at least compared to their competitors. It's really pleasing to see that they not only receive great feedback but they encourage more of it by responding to around 75% of all user posts, again the highest in the industry in South Africa.

Who saw themselves grounded

Well apart from the sad news of Skywise literally being grounded, there were some airlines who just didn't achieve the altitude of their competitors. SAA disappointingly responds to just around 10% of posts from fans, a fact which makes me wonder why they even bother to maintain a social media presence. They also saw the highest negative sentiment with almost 30% of user posts being of a negative nature. While they pump out the third highest number of posts, their engagement score was the lowest when looking at the percentage of their fans talking about their page.

Kulula similarly seems to have given up the ghost on some aspects of social media, engaging less than 1% of its Facebook fans in conversation and achieving less than 10% of overall share of voice, despite being the original low cost carrier in South Africa. Their negative sentiment was second only to SAA too. However, where they did shine was in responses to customers, nearly matching winner FlySafair's response rate.



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So how should they set up a successful festive season?

It's all very well running through the numbers, but what's going to be a lot more useful is to look at what is likely to get you success and that all important (if often illusive) return on investment.

First, you have to have your groundwork done: that behind-the-scenes stuff that will put you on the best footing for a successful season. This includes making sure your call centre is fully staffed and that tools and procedures are set up in advance to ensure a smooth customer experience. Crises in your busiest time are almost a given, if you're caught on the back foot you're going to be playing catch-up all season long and even your best marketing messages will be falling on deaf ears.

Next you need to ensure you have your audience mapped out, you have to know exactly who you're speaking to and what kind of messaging they'll respond to. Are you speaking to singles? Families? Students? What income do they have? Where do they live? Facebook has great tools such as Audience Insights to help you identify who you're going to be talking to. You can also make use of tools like custom and lookalike audiences to ensure your messaging is landing in front of exactly the right eyes.

And finally, don't neglect that awesome freebie of customer engagement. If yours are posting and commenting, keep the conversation going by responding. Those engagements cement long term relationships meaning you don't have to work as hard (or invest as much money) to get business from them in future.

ABOUT NICK PAUL

I started out in the world of social media growing Africa's largest Online Travel Agency, Travelstart's presence from just around 1500 followers to over 3 million across the globe, a community which was also one of the most highly engaged in the industry. A creative problem solver who values honest marketing, I believe in demystifying what happens on social so that businesses are more clued up as to how they're achieving their goals.

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