

teaching note

The Final Straw: Delta Airlines single-use plastic onboard

Summary of the Case

Delta Airlines has come a long way in regard to their efforts to become more sustainable and make a positive impact on the environment. It is a mission of Delta Airlines to make every aspect of their company as sustainable and environmentally friendly as possible.

Delta has taken the initiative to remove single-use plastic items from their aircraft and Delta Sky Clubs. Other sustainability efforts of the airline include the elimination of unnecessary plastic wrapping from amenity kits, reducing Styrofoam in cafeterias at their headquarters, as well as supporting other sustainability initiatives. With the determination to make a positive impact on the environment, Delta Airlines is taking many steps to be sustainable.

Target Audience

This case study focuses on environmental sustainability efforts in the airline industry and is relevant to both undergraduate and graduate level students in the hospitality tourism fields or in other high environmental impact professions that will require implementation of sustainability practices. The teaching approach will be different for each audience. An undergraduate level course instructor might want students to understand and examine the sustainability issues of the environment within the airline industry; whereas, a graduate level course instructor may have students discuss existing issues and potential future issues of sustainability based on readings associated with this case study.

Teaching Objectives

Based on the sustainability issues presented in this case study, the teaching objectives are to:

- Understand the impacts of sustainability efforts on the environment in the airline industry
- Understand how the impact of sustainability efforts affects the airline industry for the future

Learning Outcomes

This case study is a real-world example of sustainability issues and practices that impact within the airline industry. Students are expected to understand the best practices that Delta Airlines utilize to continue their sustainability efforts in the airline industry. By the end of the lesson, students should be able to:

- Recognize the positive effects of sustainability efforts within the airline industry on the environment
- Recognize the harmful effects of the industry on the environment when sustainability efforts are not taken

- Evaluate a variety of different ways that the industry contributes to environmental protection

Recommended Teaching Approach

This case study can be taught in a variety of different ways depending on the instructor's course objectives and desired learning outcomes. With this in mind, we recommend that the instructor designate two 1.5-hour classes to this case study. In the first 1.5-hour day class, the instructor can begin with a 30-minute lecture about Delta Airlines basic background and information about the airline industry as a whole so the student can gain familiarity with the industry and company itself. The instructor can then conduct another lecture about sustainability efforts and practices that relate to the airline industry. Students should learn about the positive impacts that these practices have on the industry – as well as the negative impacts on the environment when sustainability efforts are not utilized. An appropriate teaching method for both of these lectures would be verbal and visual lectures. The instructor could also present a slideshow that includes main talking points and interesting, informational videos. Instructors may also provide links to websites to provide the students with other related information relevant to the lecture.

In another 1.5-hour day class, the instructor can lead discussions to get the students involved and thinking about the topics presented in the lecture. This is an excellent opportunity for students to think in-depth about the sustainability efforts within the airline industry and the impact it has on the environment. After the discussion, the instructor can have students break into small groups. The instructor can then ask, "What are more ways that the airline industry can improve sustainability efforts that would make a positive impact on the environment that have not yet been considered?" "What role does corporate social responsibility play in the airline industry?" "Discuss the economic advantages and disadvantages of an airline company going green." Students would then brainstorm in their small groups for five to ten minutes before coming back together to share their ideas with the class.

Additional Readings

- Hallinan, B. (2019, January 08). All of the travel companies and places phasing out single-use plastic. Retrieved March 27, 2019 from <https://www.cntraveler.com/story/travel-companies-and-places-phasing-out-single-use-plastics>
- Harrison, K. (n.d.). Airline sustainability is a possibility, and KLM is leading the way. Retrieved March 29, 2019 from <https://www.tripsavvy.com/klm-airline-sustainability-efforts-4153988>
- Mayes, O. (2019, January 3). Delta recognized as corporate superhero by the

Captain Planet Foundation. Retrieved March 29, 2019 from <https://news.delta.com/delta-recognized-corporate-superhero-captain-planet-foundation>

Modolo, K. (n.d.). Beyond the straw: Delta removes single-use plastics onboard, in clubs. Retrieved April 4, 2019 from <https://news.delta.com/beyond-straw-delta-removes-single-use-plastics-onboard-clubs>