

3 DELTA PLANES SUFFER MISHAPS, WEEKEND FLIGHTS FORCED TO LAND AFTER ENGINE EMERGENCIES; NO INJURIES

Andy Pasztor

SUMMARY

Delta Airlines have had multiple engine failures within the past few months. With three emergency landings within one weekend, critics have questioned the 'stepped-up' maintenance program developed in an attempt to improve engine functions. With the pattern of failing engines, federal air safety regulators are now delving into regulating maintenance practices. Blamed on the merger between Delta and Northwest airlines, maintenance problems have been addressed as an issue revolving around incorporation of multiple systems. Throughout the Delta-Northwest merger, the new entity was forced to develop new maintenance practices, flight manuals, and flight procedures. Pilots were under two sets of conflicting requirements and regulations. With new regulations a Delta representative claimed that the regulations pertained to onboard systems rather than engines. With historic records of engine accidents within the past month and multiple malfunctions on the same aircraft, Delta-Northwest is in the process of reevaluating protocol and procedure.

PUBLIC RELATIONS ISSUE

For the public to continue having trust within Delta, the corporation must quickly and efficiently address their recent engine problems. By merging with Northwest airlines, Delta jeopardized their public trust through altering maintenance techniques and mechanical regularity. With an 'unusual spate of in flight engine malfunctions' and other maintenance caused delays/cancellations, travelers grew weary with flight delays unknowingly altering their travel

itinerary. Comparatively, Delta experienced significantly more delays than those of the competitors. Through this increase in inconveniences, ticket sales dropped and forced Delta to reevaluate their protocol for flights that encounter issues.

ASSESSMENT

Delta airlines responded to this instance adequately. Recently, Delta representatives have relayed that in-flight engine shut downs were more frequent earlier in the year. With a decrease in in-flight issues, representatives attribute the overall increase in maintenance problems to the challenges Delta faced while merging with Northwest. With efforts focused on the merger, details were considered second priority and a balance between Delta and Northwest protocol had to be developed prior to the merger being effective. Prompted by the increase in maintenance problems, Delta's management team chose to focus efforts on increasing the frequency of which some inspections are performed. A Delta representative states that they hope that frequent inspections will help in decreasing the amount of maintenance delays. By also increasing the mechanic workforce at major airports and extending layover times, time will be gained during which checks can be completed prior to transcontinental flights. Although the issues regarding Delta engines and mechanics have not been entirely resolved, the initial steps Delta has taken prove to be effective.

SOLUTION OR SUGGESTIONS

In order to effectively address the public's lack of trust towards Delta, Delta must begin a five step process. First, it is extremely important that Delta responds promptly and address the public immediately following each given incident. Since engine problems have been occurring frequently, travelers are hesitant about flying on Delta aircrafts. However with successful acknowledgement of issues and a prompt explanation of what Delta is doing to resolve the issue will encourage travelers to continuing using the airline. Second, Delta must maintain honesty towards the concerned public. Typically, if a company is honest, the public is willing to continue use of the service pending repairs and alterations. However, if false information is relayed, public support will dwindle and flight sales will plummet. Third, it is important to provide the public with information. In cases where information is not provided, the public develops their own information and rumors develop. Even though thorough information is not always available promptly after a crisis occurs, by providing the public with as much information as possible is important to ensure continued public support. Fourth, Delta must show the public that they care about the concern at hand. By showing travelers that they are concerned about malfunctions, the public is comforted by the fact that they are not alone in their concerns. People are typically more forgiving if it is clear that the corporation cares about the crisis. Finally, the corporation must maintain successful two way relationships. By listening to the public a corporation can learn valuable information regarding public opinion. Although each crisis is unique, the Delta malfunctions pertain to this system of action. The ideal solution for Delta stems from these basics. Delta has already promptly alerted public and travelers of issues they have been having. By doing this, travelers had a formal forewarning and were prepared prior to their flight. By maintaining honesty and providing information, travelers were

able to be completely aware of the situation rather than a general statement. Now, through maintaining two way relationships, travelers will continue to fly on Delta airlines while Delta Corporation focuses on alleviating issues that arose during the merger of Delta and Northwest.

PUBLIC RELATIONS PRINCIPALS

In this particular instance, multiple public relations principals are addressed. An organization exists only by public consent (principal one) arises when travelers chose to use alternate airlines due to Delta's unreliable services. If the public does not approve of how Delta is handling their current issues or if they do not feel safe flying on a Delta air plane, Delta's sales will plummet and the corporation will cease to be successful. However, principal one is successfully addressed by Delta and avoided. By their prompt admittance and acknowledgement of the issue at hand and well advertised enhanced mechanics, Delta travelers will continue to use the airline despite mechanical error. Activity does not equal results (principal six) is also addressed in Delta's current mechanical issues. With heightened awareness of Delta highlighted in news, critics are currently analyzing whether their system of mechanics are effective. Although Delta has been actively addressing issues and developing more frequent inspections, it will not be able to fully alleviate mechanic malfunctions until the crisis management plan is fully implemented. Until a successful merger and improvement in engine functionality is seen in the public, Delta's actions have not provided tangible results.