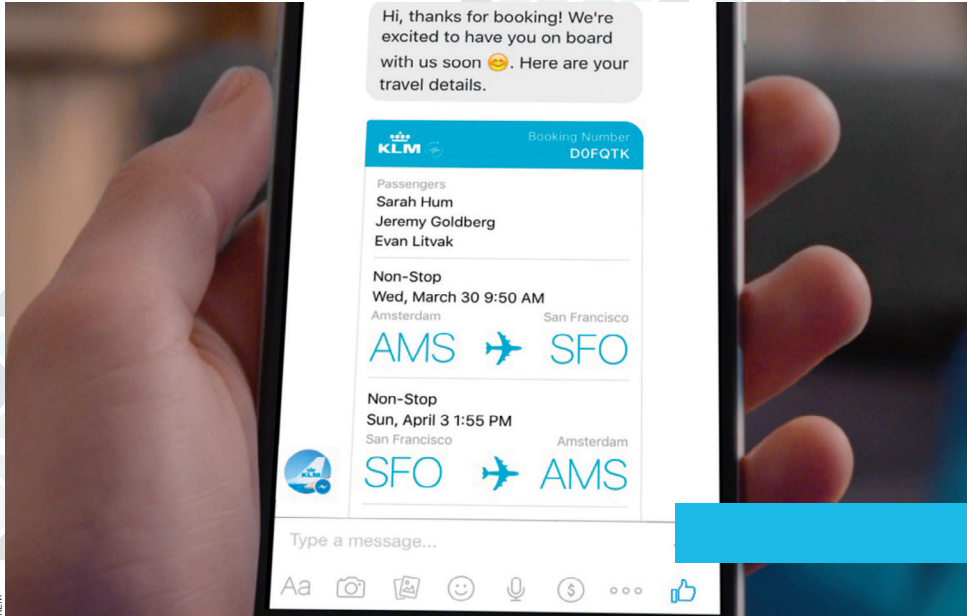




MARKETING

KLM



Groeneveld: investment is vital

“KLM is a clear winner. Right across the board, a fantastic use of digital”

PANEL JUDGE

It's hard to find an airline executive that has any positive memories of the 2010 eruption of the Eyjafjallajökull volcano and the pan-European air-travel disruption the ash cloud created.

But for KLM that natural disaster proved to be a transformational event; one that established the airline as one of the industry's leaders in the digital marketing arena.

“The eruption was truly a pivotal moment for KLM,” says Pieter Groeneveld, senior vice-president digital at Air France-KLM. “Thousands of customers flooded our social media channels and we worked 24-hour shifts to help them as well as possible.”

Groeneveld says KLM had been trying to determine its digital engagement strategy, “but from that moment on, it was clear to us: if we are serious about our customers, we need to invest heavily in digital engagement”.

Now in its 98th year, KLM may be the world's oldest airline but it also has one of industry's largest digital marketing teams, comprising around 65 staff. The team is constantly evolving, says Groen-

evel, “because of the nature of digital – fast-moving and a lot of experimentation”.

Michael Hanke, founder and managing director of aviation e-commerce specialist SkaiBlu, is a huge admirer of what KLM has achieved: “It is a role model for social customer care and it successfully combines hi-touch (with over 230 social media service agents offering 24/7 support in 10 different languages) and hi-tech.”

An example of the latter is KLM's recent launch of an artificial intelligence application to help answer customer questions, he adds.

SkaiBlu runs regular benchmarking assessments of the online performance of over 160 carriers, examining a spectrum of 28 factors in several digital areas. These activities are tracked through its “Digital Airline Score” (DAS) methodology, and it is no surprise which airline regularly appears at the top end of the rankings.

“KLM is the most visible airline across the social media landscape,” says Hanke. “It has over

23 million followers across various platforms including Facebook, Messenger, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, WeChat, KakaoTalk and VKontakte.”

Hanke says the airline ensures the best engagement by applying “the right mix between global and local, which is a must given that the bulk of its business is outside the home market”.

KLM's objective is to be Europe's most customer-centric airline, so it is no coincidence that it is recognised as the region's leader in digital engagement. “Everything we do, every decision we make leads up to that,” says Groeneveld. “Considering evolving trends and customer behaviour: it is our job to get to the essence there and don't get distracted by hypes and gimmickry.”

It's all about moving fast and “breaking stuff”: “Digital is still such a new, developing area, which we need to keep testing – and failing. It helps us to understand where technology is going and how we can use this to help our customers even better.”

Max Kingsley-Jones

PAST WINNERS

2016 JetBlue Airways | 2015 Virgin America | 2014 British Airways | 2013 Turkish Airlines | 2012 Virgin Australia | 2011 Air New Zealand | 2010 JetBlue Airways | 2009 Lufthansa | 2008 Etihad Airways | 2007 Singapore Airlines | 2006 Emirates | 2005 Southwest Airlines | 2004 LAN | 2003 JetBlue Airways | 2002 EasyJet

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