

International reservations agents have answers to tough questions

Picture this if you will. . . a passenger enroute to Germany via London approaches a station agent at the gate in CLT moments before departure time and wants to change his travel plans. Does the agent panic? Of course not! Thanks to information acquired at a recent seminar, the agent knows exactly what to do: Pick up the phone and call an international reservations agent in Winston-Salem.



Brackney

A two-day seminar on international travel and immigration was presented in early June in CLT and INT through a joint effort of Passenger Procedures and Reservation Services International, both located in INT, to address such issues as the one illustrated above. Representatives including station agents, supervisors, and customer service managers from 40 stations around the Piedmont system were invited to the seminar. Martin Silverman from British Immigration at LGW attended the seminar to discuss U.K. entry requirements. The seminar will be offered to the remaining stations in coming months. Attendees were responsible for preparing a written summary of the seminar for dissemination to co-workers at their respective stations.

"The purpose of the seminar was to acquaint our employees with what is involved in dealing with international travel," said Bill Brackney, manager-international department. "The intricacies of international travel are constantly changing, and it is our responsibility to stay informed so that we can assist our station agents when they are confronted with questions related to international travel. All they have to do is call us."

During the seminar, Brackney and his staff addressed issues such as international documentation requirements, baggage restrictions, foreign currency conversions, ticket changes and reissuance, schedules, rates, involuntary rerouting, frequent flyer, and tariffs.

A year ago when Piedmont started service to London, the International Department only had 62 international reservations agents. Currently, there are 84 agents, the majority of whom assist the public in making international reservations. The remainder of the agents are available to answer questions from station personnel.

"We want the station agents to understand the complexities of international travel to the degree that they understand why it may take a little longer to address their questions. This cuts down on their frustrations, and they can convey a calmer attitude to our customers, which can diffuse a tense situation," Brackney said.



McKee

All international agents have had nine weeks of advanced training beyond that of the normal reservations training. Candidates for the department are selected on a combination of seniority, job performance, and foreign language abilities. Thirteen agents are currently in training classes and additional classes are scheduled to begin in late June and August.

Along with dealing with international destinations, we have also had to become involved with customs and immigration. "When Piedmont acquired Empire Airlines in 1986, and we began to incorporate the Canadian destinations, we had to address the issue of customs and immigration," said Pat McKee, analyst-passenger procedures.

Basically, representatives from Passenger Procedures met with the Canadian and United States government officials to become familiar with the customs and immigration regulations. From there procedures were established which are contained in Piedmont's Standard Practice Manual as well as the Direct Reference System (DRS) in the CAREsystem for quick access.

"To distinguish between immigration and customs," McKee said, "remember that immigration deals with people control, and customs deals



INT International Reservations Agent (right) Erin Ervin shows (l to r) Ann Brooks, CLT-assistant customer service manager, and Judy Craver, CLT-station training, the tariff manuals she refers to in making international reservations.

with baggage and cargo control and inspections."

In a new program effective July 1, the U.S. Immigration Department and the U.S. Department of State have instituted a three-year Visa Waiver Pilot Program (VWPP) which will allow citizens of the United Kingdom to travel to the United States without a visa although they still must meet other requirements. U.S. citizens have been able to enter the U.K. without a visa for a number of years.

To be eligible for the program, participants must be U.K. residents, have a valid passport, purchase a round trip ticket, stay in the U.S. no longer than 90 days, enter the U.S. on a participating carrier, purchase a ticket refundable only in the country of issuance, and sign a VWPP form before departure.

"Since Piedmont will be a participating carrier in the program, more U.K. citizens will be traveling to the U.S., and the increased traffic should bolster our already successful London flights," McKee said.

"We are really pleased with the success of these seminars, not only because our employees have a better understanding of international travel, but it also gave us the opportunity to put names and faces together," Brackney said. "It's also a nice way to celebrate the anniversary of our first year of service to London."

Questions cover merger date, married employees

As of mid-June, we have received more than 2,000 calls on the '800' information line, and we have distributed over 1,000 individual responses. Many of the duplicated questions (such as those below) have had responses in the *Piedmonitor* or through the *Declassified*. Here is an additional sampling of employee questions and management's response.

Q. Has the proposed date for the merger been delayed? I heard originally that the two airlines would merge prior to year end and that doesn't seem to be the case.

A. Senior executives of both airlines have confirmed that the full operational merger of the two airlines will probably not take place until sometime in the first quarter of 1989. We continue to believe that the most orderly merger, with the greatest concerns for our customers and our employees, takes priority over hastiness or meeting an arbitrary timetable. It should be noted that between now and the "official merger day," Piedmont in particular will be adjusting many of its procedures to bring its flight and maintenance operations to a "mirror image" of USAir's to expedite FAA sanction of the merged company's procedures.

Above answer provided by Bill McGee, chairman, president and chief executive officer.

Q. Why is USAir hiring part-time agents at my airport, and our hours are being cut at Piedmont?

A. USAir and Piedmont now use the same staffing procedures to determine station complements. Shifts are based upon allotted number of hours. For a station to comply with staffing requirements, hours may have to be adjusted (higher or lower) to meet authorized staffing. We are striving to keep employment at each airport

close to the needs of the merged carrier. This will minimize displacements after the merger. However, we have months to go before the merger, and we want to maintain the highest possible levels of service for customers of both airlines in the interim.

Q. Why is it that personnel working in inflight services cannot transfer to customer service or operations?

A. Stations, including inflight services, are being staffed according to new staffing methods. As staffing complements are authorized, management is considering several possibilities that allow more systemwide transfers. Those transfers may include inflight services to other work areas within a station. No final decision has been made.

Q. Are station work schedules no longer posted in advance?

A. Work schedules for station personnel are posted to provide employees with a schedule of their assigned shift. They are to be prepared prior to the 20th of the month preceding the month to which the schedule applies. If the work schedule isn't posted on time, station personnel should contact their local manager.

Above answers provided by Leonard Martin, senior vice president-passenger services.

Q. What procedure should I follow to travel on USAir? How am I ticketed?

A. PI employees may proceed directly to USAir gates and present their valid company ID card and flight pass PA-T-401 (write-your-own-pass form) or an industry travel ticket (form 042) for boarding. PI employees will be boarded after USAir employees on USAir flights, and USAir

employees will be boarded after Piedmont employees on Piedmont flights. PI employees should obtain Piedmont flight passes and industry travel tickets through their departments as usual and use them when traveling on USAir flights just as they would if traveling on Piedmont.

Above answer provided by Faye McIntyre, manager-pass bureau.

Q. Has the Inflight Action Line been disconnected? Has the '800' information line taken its place?

A. No, to both questions. We want to encourage flight attendants to continue to call our Action Line.

Above answer provided by Trula Scott, director-inflight services.

Q. What is USAir's policy about married employees working together?

A. USAir's personnel policy provides that relatives (spouses included) will not be permitted to work in any supervisor/subordinate relationship. It further provides that applicants may not be employed nor employees transferred into any department in which a relative is a foreman, supervisor, manager or director. We are not aware of any restrictions that would preclude two station agents from the same station being married, so long as such was not contrary to the foregoing.

Above answer provided by Dwain Andrews, staff vice president-labor and employee relations.

