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APRIL 2020*

MICRO INFLUENCERS GIVE WINGS TO INDIGO'S CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE STRATEGY

On a rather hot and sultry day in the month of May, Nitin Sethi was shaken out of a Sunday siesta by the relentless ringing of his phone. On the other end of the line was his boss, extremely agitated and on the edge. Cutting straight to the point, he wanted to know if Sethi was aware of what was happening on the airline's handle on a certain social media platform. Still somewhat groggy, Sethi scampered, went online to see there were a flurry of customer complaints that had flooded the airline's official handle, with netizens from all around the world joining the din. This was barely a month after Nitin Sethi had joined IndiGo as Vice President, Digital.

What followed was a good nine hours of Online Reputation Management (ORM), assuaging some customers, and veering and steering conversations in the right direction for the brand. Although a fire-fighting exercise, what happened on the social media that day was what could happen to service providers, especially airlines, on any given day. For an airline, the triggers could be anything from a flight cancellation, rescheduling of a flight, long check-in/ baggage drop queues, baggage loss to in-flight services or food choices. On that Sunday afternoon, it was a celebrity who had jumped a long check-in queue on the Delhi-Hyderabad sector, infuriating a host of waiting passengers. Sethi and his team had to first go and check with the ground staff to get answers to questions like: Why did the celebrity jump the queue? Why did the ground staff prioritize his check-in over others? What transpired on the ground? Why were there allegations of some passengers being "manhandled", etc.? The Digital team then had to liaise with the ORM team to initiate an online damage control exercise.

Prof. Indranil Bose of the Indian Institute of Management Calcutta and Bhaswati Mukhopadhyay developed this case study as the basis for class discussion rather than to illustrate the effective or ineffective running of an organization.

Sethi donned his 'design thinking' cap to take a more customer-centered approach and reasoned forward to quell the backlash - both from the side of the celebrity and that of the other passengers. The exercise, as intense as it was, brought some critical issues to the fore. That the real brand evangelists were the ordinary netizens, who probably had only a few thousand followers but had the power to make or break a brand. They had the power to drive online conversations. That Sunday, when IndiGo's Digital team came back online to start conversations about the brand's ethics, staff behavior and the reason why a certain celebrity was allowed to break the queue (due to a medical emergency), it was these ordinary netizens who were seen putting their weight behind the brand. This incident made Sethi and the team ponder over certain key questions: What did IndiGo have to do to pre-empt and deal with the unpredictability of the social media? Did they need to redefine their digital marketing strategy? If so, how?