

## ***Mobile Marketer***

### **“Southwest Airlines taps SMS to streamline customer service”**

MAY 6, 2010

Southwest Airlines is using SMS to cut airport wait time and inbound passenger calls.

The airline uses SMS to alerts passengers of flight delays, cancellations and gate changes.

“Southwest noticed two trends that made it more important to contact passengers on their mobile devices,” said Fred Taylor, senior manager of proactive customer service communications at Southwest Airlines, Dallas. “More voice messages were being left, which created the potential to miss critical flight information.

“Also, many passengers started listing cell phone numbers and email addresses as their primary mode of communication when purchasing tickets,” he said. “Southwest needed a way to reach these customers over their preferred channel while maintaining streamlined communications that integrated easily with its existing customer service infrastructure.

“Southwest achieved both its goals by upgrading to the Varolii Unified Interact Platform, which offers a fully unified communications solution that enables easy and effective one-to-one communication.”

Southwest Airlines is an American low-cost airline headquartered on the grounds of Love Field in Dallas, TX.

Varolii is a market and technology service provider which blends voice, SMS and email into a single conversation and provides recipients with multiple options to take action.

### **Sky High**

Southwest Airlines has more than 3,200 flights and claims it has to reschedule flights or cancel them altogether, due to severe weather.

“We looked for a more efficient way to communicate with passengers about changes in flight services,” Mr. Taylor said. “Knowing the prevalence of mobile phone usage and how consumers crave instant information, Southwest felt that using interactive AOM would dramatically enhance customer awareness, satisfaction and loyalty.

Southwest used Varollii's pre-recorded automated outbound messaging service to notify customers of flight cancellations, offer an apology, explain the new arrangements being offered as well as provide the option to transfer to a call agent.

The new SMS strategy is designed to increase proactive passenger outreach, reduce inbound calls and improve contact center management.

Other airlines such as Alaska Airlines and Continental Airlines have paperless bar codes, which Southwest is considering for the future.

“Southwest is always looking for new ways to incorporate technology to make our business more efficient and still provide exceptional customer service,” Mr. Taylor said. “I work with our business leadership to drive new communication initiatives, products and services that offer better information/accommodations to our customers.”

Noticing the dependency on mobile, Southwest wants to adapt to the lifestyle of its passengers.

“As more passengers adopt mobile devices as their primary mode of communications, airlines have the opportunity to interact with customers faster and more often than ever,” Mr. Taylor said. “Customers are starting to expect information at their fingertips, and waiting in line to speak to customer service agents is not always acceptable.

“In order to stay competitive, and to leave a positive, lasting impression on customers, Southwest Airlines proactively communicates critical information to its customers via the channel they most prefer, but we strongly suggest that it be their mobile device knowing it will be with them when they travel,” he said.