

The PCS Team Story

By Colleen Barrett

Keeping a finger on the pulse of Southwest Airlines' daily operations and making sure our Internal and External Customers are on the same page is a way of life for the Proactive Customer Service (PCS) Team¹.

In June 2001, I plucked Fred Taylor, Jr. from the Frontlines; tucked him under my wing; and asked him to take on new responsibilities for coordinating the Company's proactive Customer communications. Since then, Fred has created the PCS Team and, over the last eight years, this small group of five has become a multifaceted entity that works directly with our operational, communication, and support departments to help make sure the information and assistance being provided to Southwest's Internal and External Customers about our operations is accurate, timely, consistent, and meaningful.

Fred's drive for innovation has helped the Company create a unique Customer accommodation program² and make the case for an advanced Customer messaging system³ that supports our proactive communication initiatives. And, with the backing of Senior and Executive Leadership, the PCS Team is constantly developing new ways to provide more timely and cost-effective communications vis-à-vis SWALife, **southwest.com**, and electronic MOM/Merge correspondence⁴; while at the same time enhancing the overall message that is being delivered to our Customers by way of personal notifications and online MOM/Merge videos⁵.

The PCS Team's initiatives are unique to Southwest Airlines and their efforts are directly and congruently tied to the Company's cost management, revenue production, and Customer goodwill initiatives. The results of their proactive work have been (and continue to be) featured in over 50 print, television, and Internet media including: *Business Week*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Houston Chronicle*, NBC, CBS, and Fox TV.

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End Notes

¹ **PCS Team:** Led by Fred Taylor, Jr. Senior Manager Proactive Customer Service Communications, the PCS Team is responsible for monitoring the Company's day-to-day operation (systemwide) and developing, implementing, and leading Southwest Airlines' internal and external proactive Customer Service communications and accommodation initiatives involving: MOM/Merge correspondence; Business Continuation Plan (BCP); Weather Disruption Task Force (WDTF) and Weather Disruption Response Plan (WDRP); and Automated Outbound Messaging (AOM) programs. The PCS Team is also a point of contact for coordinating the Company's response initiatives for Unruly Customers, Young Travelers, and Medical Emergency incidents that happen during the normal course of business.

² **Southwest Operational Disruption Accommodations (SODA):** SODA guidelines were developed so all Southwest Airlines Employees (particularly in our Customer communications departments—Ground Operations, Reservations, Customer Relations, and Public Relations) offer and follow universal accommodation procedures to ensure Customers receive consistent information and service. In order to maintain the Company's communications initiatives, the PCS Team manages the implementation of the SODA and the method of delivering that message to Southwest's Internal and External Customers. With SODA, Southwest Employees are empowered to provide immediate support at the first point of contact—be that face-to-face, electronically, via the Internet, over the telephone (or some wireless device), and/or in writing. In a nutshell, Southwest Customers are allowed to change their travel plans prior to their original departure date or up to 14 days after their scheduled day of travel.

³ **Automated Outbound Messaging (AOM):** The PCS Team's concept for AOM is to provide efficient and cost-effective proactive notifications to the masses about flight disruptions. More specifically, using a third-party (Varolii) service, AOM will deliver customized communications to Customers if their scheduled flight could be or has been disrupted, as well as information about the flexible accommodations Southwest is offering. Working with all departments involved, the PCS Team is leading the way insofar as the development of the business rules and guidelines surrounding the AOM notifications; coordinating AOM training of Southwest's Frontline Employees; and oversight of AOM notifications during day-to-day ops. AOM provides Southwest Customers a better travel experience, reduces Southwest's costs, and minimizes the pressure on Frontline Employees.

⁴ **MOM/Merge Correspondence:** MOM is an acronym that stands for the Morning Overview Meeting. Each day at 9:00 a.m. CT, Monday through Friday, Representatives from the Operations Coordination Center, Flight Operations, Ground Operations, Maintenance, Inflight, and the PCS Team meet to review the previous day's flight activity from across Southwest's system (Friday, Saturday, and Sunday are reviewed on Monday). The purpose of this meeting is to determine what (if any) operational irregularities occurred. From that, the PCS Team will quickly gather the facts about that particular situation and combine (or "Merge") it into a proactive letter (delivered by e-mail to each Customer's designated address) that provides the Customers with an immediate/straight-forward explanation, a heartfelt apology, and an open invitation to give Southwest another try.

⁵ **MOM/Merge Videos:** In order to enhance the proactive correspondence experience, the PCS Team came up with an innovative idea to use online video in their MOM/Merge correspondence to explain what happened. The result of this unique concept is another "first" in the airline industry—in addition to proactively apologizing for flight disruptions, Southwest Customers will be invited to watch a short/friendly/educational video to help them better understand what the PCS Team is describing (in their MOM/Merge letter). As such, under the right set of circumstances, the PCS Team will include a hyperlink to the appropriate video story.