

**Delta Airlines: Connecting the World through Purpose**

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## **Introduction**

When examining the airline industry, Delta Air Lines stands out as a leader worldwide known for its commitment to the service they give to their customers as well as other things such as: innovation and reliability. Founded in 1925, Delta over the years has become one of the largest airlines in the world, serving millions of passengers each year across a wide catalog of countries it travels to. But Delta's true success focuses on the way it has built its brand identity around a clear mission and with a clear purpose: "Connecting the world by creating memories and opportunities." This mission goes beyond simply transporting passengers from one destination to another; it focuses on creating a meaningful experience for the customer, also fostering human connections and the possibility of having personal and professional growth through travel.

Delta's mission reflects a visionary approach to marketing and service, where creating an emotional impact and providing satisfactory service are just as important as efficiency in Delta's operations. By prioritizing comfort, safety, and innovation, the company positions itself not only as a transportation provider, but as a brand that improves the journey itself. Basically, this demonstrates that Delta is very customer-focused, and this is noticeable in everything, from its in-flight services to its digital options. Thanks to this, the company not only transports people but also makes the entire journey more comfortable, safe, and enjoyable, showing how a clear mission can strengthen its brand and long-term success.

## **Mission Statement**

In a hierarchical structure, mission statements contribute heavily to an organization's reputation. The term "mission statement" refers to a foundational declaration that outlines a

company's purpose, core values, and reason for existence. Kemp and Dwyer (2003) identify it as "the most generalized statement of organizational purposes,, and expression of its raison d'être." Because larger organizations like Delta have accumulated large amounts of customers, it is their responsibility to provide the services they market in their mission statement. Their mission statement is "to connect people to opportunities while expanding the understanding of our plant and the people within it" (DeltaAirlines, 2026). The company's mission emphasizes global awareness, connectivity, and a customer-centric approach. This outlines what Delta exists to do, and the principles that shape their organizational design.

Delta Airline's mission emphasizes a modern airlines dedication to connection. This is visible through employment opportunities, attention to detail, customer service, and adaptability. These factors are expected of quality airlines, and Delta is no expectation to these standards. A company's mission statement tends to align with their Brand Identity, and this particular focus allows customers to feel like Delta Airline is reliable and trustworthy. The statement supports customer experience initiatives, provides credibility for Delta's superb reputation, and influences potential customers into using their services. In addition to this, the company's mission statement emphasizes and influences the direction of operational decisions.

In other words, because Delta is in accordance with its heavily marketed goals, there is an established need for the company to produce quality customer experiences throughout their operations.

### **Vision Statement**

Similarly to a mission statement, a vision statement aims to identify goals that align with companies' long term goals and the future state they might aim to achieve. It serves as a strategic declaration that can guide decision-making, workplace culture, and planning. In other words, it

outlines organizational aspirations. Delta Airline's Vision statement is, "To be the world's most trusted airline" (Delta Airlines, 2026). This highlights the company's dedication to global reach, innovation, and long-term customer loyalty. Delta's performance has a significant focus on quality. This pertains to customer experience, reliability, safety, and global reach.

Delta's operations foster customer trust and experience by setting a very high company-wide standard. This aligns with the vision of being the world's most trusted airline because it aligns with strategic investments and employee management. Customer experience reinforces brand loyalty, therefore emphasizing the airline's vision.

### **Strategic Approach**

Delta Air Lines implements a broad differentiation strategic approach, meaning they identify "...industry-wide competitive advantages that set an offering apart from competitors. For this type of strategy to succeed, the customer market must be vast, unsaturated, and have numerous unresolved pain points." (Gaussian, 2022). There are many issues in the airline industry that directly affect how each airline is perceived by the market that it serves. According to an article published in the Emerald Insight Journal, "Factors that affect perceived service performance include customer service, delays and baggage management. Empathy and reliability have the biggest impact on the perceived satisfaction of passengers." (Dike, et al, 2024). Delta does an excellent job of addressing customer complaints and conflicts. Each resource found on the company website begins with a phrase stating the company's apology for the inconvenience the customer is experiencing, followed by reassurance that the company will do everything possible to get the issue resolved. For cancelled flights, or, for what Delta defines as a significant delay (a difference of 3 hours for arrival or departure for domestic flights, or 6 hours for departure or arrival for international flights), Delta provides free rebooking and automatically

updates the customer through their preferred method of communication. Further instructions and resources for booking other flights, handling baggage for flight changes, steps for receiving a refund, and more, are easily found on Delta's website, and are simple and direct. These details ease customer frustration and give them a sense of comfort, feeling reassured that all is fixable. The airline also provides various resources for customers to file complaints, paperwork to reclaim lost or damaged baggage, instructions for filing for a flight refund, and more.

Furthering its broad differentiation strategy, Delta sets itself apart by providing high-quality experiences for its customers, advocating for and working towards increasing company-wide sustainability practices, and researching and advancing aircraft technology. Delta is well known for its customer experience, receiving numerous awards and recognition over its 102 years of service. More recent customer service recognitions include Delta Air Lines receiving top marks in Newsweek's 2026 BrandSpark Most Trusted Awards for "Best Airline Loyalty Program", "Best Airline for Customer Service", "Best Airline for Domestic Travel", and "Best Airline for International Travel", as well as being named "most on-time North American airline" by Cirium and "Top U.S. Airline" in 2025. These honors are reflected in the benefits and perks provided to Delta's customers. For members of Delta's SkyMiles loyalty program, which is free to join, free wifi, tailored and preferred deals, and increased flight point accrual which can be put towards hotel reservations, car rental, and dining experiences, are just a few of the basic benefits that can be accessed, which increase with each loyalty tier. This program also offers various American Express credit cards which each offer unique benefits and savings opportunities. Because this program can be accessed by all levels of customers, Delta shows their dedication to serving their customers well, no matter at which level or with which status they travel.

Delta not only takes pride in caring for its customers, but also the world they live in. The company has implemented various sustainable changes in its company both on board and on the ground. One major change that has been made is the switch from plastic to paper cups on all flights, which was projected to help eliminate 7 million pounds of single-plastic waste, as well as replacing single-use plastic cutlery and dishware with bamboo alternatives, which are biodegradable. This is just one example of actions that the company has already taken to reduce its impact on the environment. The 2024 Delta Difference Report details many more, which account for the removal of more than 8 million pounds of single-use plastic waste annually. Delta also has initiatives for finding a more sustainable alternative to its current jet fuel. Although this is still in progress, the company continues working on other ways to eliminate waste and lower its carbon footprint in real time. Waste sorting and diversion protocols are also being implemented both on board and on the ground to help divert recyclable materials from being dumped into landfills. In 2024, 12 million pounds of waste was diverted from landfills and instead sorted and recycled. The company states that “Achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 for our airline operations is our ultimate goal.” (Delta Air Lines, 2026).

### **Ethics and Morals**

When it comes to ethics and morals from a corporate point of view there are a lot of factors to consider. In their work *Ethics and Leadership in Crisis Management: A Systematic Literature review* Dwinanda et al. write that, “Ethical leadership ensures that leaders act in ways consistent with fairness, accountability, and transparency, especially when facing significant uncertainty” (2025, p.52). In other words, ethical choices influence public trust and long-term reputation. In Delta’s case, the organization’s ethical framework is demonstrated by their focus on a “people-first” culture.

A key factor in Delta Airlines success is its commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion as well as corporate social responsibility. Delta works prohibitively to create a workplace environment that reflects diverse communities, promotes equal opportunities for all nationalities that are employed with Delta. () Therefore, initiatives are focused on inclusive hiring, leadership development, and employee resource groups. Allowing the company to create a culture where different perspectives are valued and where innovation will thrive. Having this innovative focus on equality rather than inequality. Delta's internal team supports minority-owned businesses and invests in communities through partnerships and outreach programs.

Delta has taken important sustainability in reducing environmental impact, recognizing the airline industry role in contributing to climate change. The company invested in more fuel-efficient aircraft, carbon reduction strategies, and research into sustainable aviation fuels. These efforts demonstrate commitment to building a long lasting sustainable future while maintaining operational excellence. As well, corporations handles the social responsibility that extends to disaster relief, education, and global health initiatives. Reinforcing a sustainability that is consistent with organizations that will focus on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). Highlights will show how modern companies balance profitability with ethical responsibility, strengthen both brand reputation and impact on society.

### **Proactive and Reactive Strategies**

Airplanes do not generate revenue on the ground. As a result, airlines will try to minimize "idle time" on the tarmac. Subsequently, a lot of airlines utilize many proactive measures in their operations. On an international flight, roughly 30% of the trip's expenses rely on the fuel costs that airlines face. Due to recent geopolitical developments, the Strait of Hormuz was closed,

impacting global crude oil prices. Because oil is the key component of jet fuel, the industry has seen a 100% increase in fuel prices. To isolate themselves from these price impacts, some airlines tend to utilize fuel hedging as a proactive protection measure. Unfortunately, in the US, many airlines have abolished fuel hedging or any fuel protection measures (Reuters, 2026a); Delta has not. Delta bought an oil refinery outside Trainer, Pennsylvania in 2012 (Xu, 2026a). By establishing a market-isolated jet fuel supply, Delta not only reduces its exposure to market volatility but also establishes leverage in the jet-fuel market. They can control the supply economics and increase operational resilience because of their end-to-end supply chain control.

To establish the operational reliability of their planes, Delta introduced predictive maintenance. Their systems will forecast component failures in real-time, powered by Bata Analytics and AI (Bollhoefer, 2024). Since aircraft have multiple thousands of cycles a year, having a plane out of order for a while represents an immense economic loss. To reduce fleet implications, Delta will service aircraft based on its forecasting systems. This improves aircraft utilization, lowers long-term maintenance costs, and transforms the traditionally reactive maintenance, repair, and operations (MRO) department into a proactive system.

Airline operations are highly vulnerable to weather disruptions. To counter immense weather impacts, Delta applies a forecasting system to its network planning. If data predicts a network disruption, the system will calculate passenger demand on the affected routes and adjust the route planning to avoid the constraint (Patov, 2024). By switching routes or capacities before major storms hit, Delta utilizes its capacities on other routes. While the capacities might not meet original operational targets, the proactive revenue from these trips represents previously uncollectable revenue. Additionally, this will impact on-time performance KPIs, lower the

compensation costs from cancelled flights, and improve the customer experience by eliminating delay wait times.

Reactive approaches are very rarely in operation, as they only represent expenses for an airline. No reactive approach will improve profit margins for a commercial aviation company. Nevertheless, Delta's reactive approaches include consumer compensation and crisis response systems. If Delta fails to provide the trip to the customers, it is responsible for any accommodation or rebooking of its intended passengers. In theory, this will improve customer satisfaction after service failures. It does not fix the operational cause. For legacy airlines, this is a brand protection measure. Delta's crisis response teams are responsible for IT or operational breakdowns, minimizing the public exposure of these events. They manage the emergency staffing and communicate with affected customers. The team's purpose is to reduce reputational damage and support affected families through assigned employees.

### **Expansion Challenges and Problem-Solving Measures**

Delta's main hub, Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport (ATL), operates close to maximum capacity for US safety standards. The airports' limited take-off/landing slots will impact Delta's growth if not addressed. Domestic routes feeding transfer passengers into ATL will be unable to meet frequency demand. Furthermore, Delta, like every other airline, faces the original equipment manufacturer (OEM) bottleneck (Reuters, 2026b). OEMs like Boeing and Airbus have extensive order backlogs and delivery delays of multiple years, especially Boeing. Their supply chain is highly volatile, and disruptions or labor shortages will trickle over to Delta's operational strategy. Delayed aircraft delivery will slow down fleet expansion, requiring older and cost-inefficient models to continue operations, leading to stagnant growth.

The airline might also face labor constraints in its expansion strategy. Currently, the industry faces Pilot and MRO crew shortages. On top, a larger scale of operations might introduce new safety requirements and higher airport slot regulations. The infrastructure for front-end expansion builds on gate availability and airport congestion rates. If airports are already at capacity, Delta can only expand by improving efficiency on the back end.

Delta needs to optimize slot efficiencies. High-demand routes need larger planes, and improved turnaround times will increase gate cycles. Fleet Strategy needs to shift towards fuel-efficient aircraft and higher-capacity planes. Aircraft like the A380 have been retired based on reduced demand from COVID, but market projections see the travel industry growing. The early retirement of high-capacity twin-engine aircraft might backfire when trying to meet growing demand. Delta's fleet must also represent operational flexibility. If certain models have a defect or are subject to a recall, Delta needs to minimize operational impact by avoiding reliance on a singular OEM fleet.

Delta could also expand its network through its SkyTeam alliance. Feeding American passengers over Delta to KLM or Air France will increase network frequency without adding additional intercontinental flights. Codesharing will allow easy transfer for Delta customers, and airlines within the Group could share capacities. It allows operational growth without significant capital allocation.

To support the increase in operational scale, Delta must double down on predictive analytics, AI, automation, and its predictive technologies. Over time, efficiency will improve for everyone in the industry, but disruptive technologies like AI will create substantial competitive advantages for Delta.

Delta's competitive advantages lie in its internal strategies. They have to be keen on data-reliant operations and invest in proactive operational technologies like AI and automation. The majority of the company's expansion roots in back-end optimization. New routes and additional flights are difficult to establish, but operational efficiency and optimization can continuously improve. Delta's long-term success depends on three factors: innovation, efficiency, and flexibility, which translate into operational resilience.

### **Board of Directors**

At the core of Delta's operations is its experienced and capable Board of Directors, which meets at least four times a year, as well as having regular meetings without management to ensure independent oversight. The Board of Directors also provides the company with strategic oversight of corporate governance policies and maintains programs such as Delta's Enterprise Risk Management. This risk management program is notable for its efforts to maintain social and corporate governance policies, assess various risk factors that could affect the company's success, and uphold other important aspirations, such as environmental and social improvements that benefit everyone. Delta also strives to ensure safety and protection for all who fly with the airline company through this risk management program, and the evaluation and addressing of different risks that could have a negative effect on the company is key to their success.

Delta's Board of Directors has long been known for being made up of independent individuals who come from many diverse backgrounds and who are experienced in many different aspects that benefit the company. At Delta, diversity within their employees is highly important to them, and their Board of Directors is a clear example of that commitment. For example, 8 out of 14 directors on this board come from historically underrepresented genders, races, or ethnicities, and from that group, 29% are female, while 43% come from

racially/ethnically diverse backgrounds such as Hispanic, Asian, Latino, and African American (Delta). These statistics showcase how Delta has worked and is continuing to strive to create a positive workplace environment that does not discriminate amongst people, whether that be within the internal or external workings of the company.

At the helm of Delta's board of directors is the CEO and Director, Ed Bastian, who has been leading the company to success since 2016. His focus for the company is one that is people-driven and customer-focused, whilst also embracing the spirit of innovation through his many technological advancements, and also pushing the company to live up to its title of the world's most reliable and rewarded airline. His leadership is based on shared values with the company, and these values have successfully assisted him in leading Delta to the trusted position it holds today. As a result of this success, Bastian was named by Fortune to be among "The World's 50 Greatest Leaders" in 2018 and then in 2023 as the Chief Executive of the Year (Delta News Hub, 2026). Other notable members of the Board of Directors include figures such as Christophe Beck, Chairman and Chief Executive of Ecolab Inc., Maria Black, President and Chief Executive Officer of Automatic Data Processing Inc., and Leslie Hale, President and Chief Executive Officer of RLJ Lodging Trust (Delta Governance). The process of selecting these individuals involves a nominating committee whose job is to assess the board's current needs, and seek out qualified candidates who will then begin an interviewing process, and then the final remaining candidates are nominated and a vote is taken by the committee as to who fits the position best based on skill level, experience, diversity, and background information. This process is highly important in maintaining standards and policies on the Board of Directors, and helps the company to maintain its positive internal environment. Finally, with the help of all these individuals, and many others, Delta has been able to experience tremendous growth and

innovation throughout the past several years, and will continue to improve in the years ahead.

### **Suggestions for Delta**

As Delta continues to grow and push the limits of airline standards, there are many opportunities that the company can take advantage of that could not only inspire people to choose Delta but also help them rise above the challenges that they are faced with. When it comes to operational and technical improvements, suggestions for the company would involve incorporating more fuel-efficient aircraft to replace older models, thereby reducing their environmental footprint and increasing their overall sustainability efforts. Another improvement suggestion would be to implement more AI-driven logistics to help cut back on costs and reduce confusion when it comes to technicalities such as passenger transfers, baggage handling, and even in security aspects. A big technological advancement that Delta has made recently comes in the form of an AI-powered assistant in the Delta app called Delta Concierge which is designed to assist members of the company's SkyMiles program by providing real-time answers to questions customers may have, whether it is a simple question like flight arrival and departure time, seat number, or even bag tracking and claim status info (Delta News Hub, 2025). This innovation has provided Delta's customers with many advantages that have greatly improved their ability to get real time answers to questions that need answers as soon as possible.

Like any company, Delta also has its strengths and weaknesses within its operations, and a few examples of strengths that the company has included such items as a strong brand reputation and customer trust, a focus on customer service, and operational excellence that sets Delta apart from competitors, and has greatly contributed to its overall success. Delta's reputation is also a strength of theirs in that it is highly reliable, and people feel safe flying all over the globe with them because of the reliability they offer. Some of the weaknesses that Delta

deals with are its high operational costs, because even though they are very much advanced in their operations, this advancement has come at a cost, and could result in a precarious financial position for the company. Another weakness that the company must face is the fact that while Delta does do business globally, the majority of its business is done within the US market, and that dependence that the company has on this market is causing it to miss out on global opportunities for expansion (Jurevicius, 2025). Delta has truly become a giant in the airline industry, and because of the successful strategies and customer policies they have utilized in the past years, it is obvious that it has no intention of slowing down in the years to come.

### **Conclusion**

In the end, Delta Airlines stands out because it consistently backs up its mission with real actions. Rather than just promoting strong values, the company follows through by focusing on customer experience, reliability, and overall service quality. This consistency helps build trust and keeps customers choosing Delta over competitors. Another key takeaway is how much Delta focuses on being proactive instead of reactive. By using strategies like predictive maintenance, advanced planning, and technology-driven systems, the company works to prevent problems before they happen. This not only improves efficiency but also creates a smoother and less stressful experience for passengers. However, like any major airline, Delta still faces challenges such as high operational costs, limited airport capacity, and pressure to expand globally. Delta's success is achievable through clear direction, strong leadership, and a focus on both employees and customers. By adapting to challenges and maintaining a high standard of service, the company has built a strong reputation and is well-positioned to continue to grow in the future.

## **Impact Statements**

### ***Manuel:***

Working on the Delta Air Lines project helped me realize how passionate I am at studying my major, especially my focus on marketing within Business Administration. Business felt more about operations and marketing felt more creative. But this project made me realize they are completely connected. Everything a company does on the business side shows up in how it markets itself.

For me personally, this really impacted how I see digital marketing. I don't want to just create ads or content or do conversion rates. I want to build experiences that actually mean something to people. Seeing how Delta uses its app, loyalty program, and communication to make customers feel confident and valued made me understand what high-level marketing looks like. It is not loud or overwhelming, it is consistent and intentional.

This project made me take my goals more seriously. As someone pursuing Business Administration with a focus on marketing, it pushed me to think bigger and start developing skills that go beyond creativity, like understanding data, customer behavior, and strategy. It made me realize that if I want to stand out, I have to think differently and focus on creating real value, not just attention.

### ***Emily:***

Delta has been my personal airline of choice for most of my solo traveling, because I can depend on their quality as well as their service. In terms of marketing, I think that Delta's customer-centric approach allows there to be an emphasis on personalization. In other words, the emotional connection established with the stakeholders is clearly present in the company's marketing efforts. In addition to this, there is an established sense of reputation. Delta has a consistent track record and is known for the quality of their service. For many customers like myself, the quality of an airline experience determines a better outlook on travel. Marketing

alignment requires authentic business to consumer communication and consistent brand voice. One of the most memorable parts of flying Delta, aside from their service, is their airline safety video. It reinforces credibility with customers before every flight, therefore making customers feel validated in their choice to fly Delta.

One important aspect of the company's marketing strategy is user experience. Because the majority of consumers relay their positive experiences with the airline through reviews and word of mouth, Delta's reputation as a leader in the airline industry is validated. In other words, Delta is a quality airline because customers believe it to be so. They design campaigns that extend the brand promise into the customer experience, from digital platforms to in-flight service. In addition to their top-tier marketing approach, Delta has always allowed me to fly safely and happily. Their advertising is truly validated by their service.

***Annaliza:***

I think it is easy for those in business to lose sight of what really matters: the people that you are serving and the impact you have on the world around you. As a marketing major, I truly value and appreciate the importance and focus that Delta places on serving its customers well. It is a company with a service mindset and has a clear understanding that customers are willing to pay more for great service. This is the kind of principle I want to carry out into the world after graduation: The idea that your financial goals can still be met while setting a good example for others and doing things right. Reviews of the company, its success, and the numerous awards that it has been given reflect this idea. Even within the company, employees appear to be dedicated to its mission. In our interview with Stephanie, she mentioned this. She also emphasized how Delta holds its employees accountable. Especially during the shutdown and COVID, these were hard standards to meet, but the company went above and beyond to continue to show its dedication to its customers.

These gestures create marketing buzz all on their own. Aside from Delta's various ad campaigns, such as their recent partnering with the 2026 Winter Olympics in Milano Cortina. Showing consistency and care encourages customers to bring others in for business. They want to share their great experiences and have more of the same.

***Katy:***

The impact that Delta has left on me is based on past experiences with the company, and just through the research that I have done on it, is one of admiration for their dedication to those they serve, and how they make it their literal mission to build trust, and connect with the people they are serving now in order to establish opportunities in the future to serve those people over and over again. As a business management major, I have come to realize just how important it is for a company, especially a company that offers a service to its customers, to build a good brand reputation that people will immediately recognize, and gravitate towards because they know that they will be well-taken care of, and they are able to feel as though that company has their best interests in mind. In my opinion, Delta has truly built and established a brand of being service-oriented through their overall consistency, dedication to constant improvement, and genuine care for the people they serve.

Good leadership policies and standards is another huge aspect of Delta's success in recent years, and is a key component in any successful business because if the leader is not exhibiting the qualities and characteristics that the company stands for, then it is much less likely that the employees, or the company as a whole will exhibit those characteristics, and that can be highly damaging for the company's reputation, and those involved with it. So, overall, it is vital that businesses ensure that the mission and goals that their company is based on is being upheld by good leadership, strong standards and policies, and procedures that honor those that they serve, and the business as a whole.

***Niklas:***

Delta has left an impact on me regarding its proactive strategies. For the majority of businesses in rural areas, constraints or situations require reactive measures, leading to prolonged logistical implications or reduced revenue flow. Based on their gained experience from the complications, businesses will then adjust to prevent future delays or bottlenecks. Delta skips those steps. Their managerial strategies are centered around proactive systems. Everything they implement is characterized by sustainability, forecasting, and calculated predictions. What I learned from this paper and the interview with Dr. Stephanie Baldwin showed me that Delta's competitive edge is its people. The way the company empowers employees and fosters a positive culture in the organization conveys a contagious spirit. Their success is driven by employee involvement, and the long-term relationships Delta has built since its bankruptcy.

Because of Delta's customer trust through operational credibility, people will pay a premium to fly with them. Passengers are familiar with their business model, and their consistency of operational excellence is why they achieve the highest market cap. As a managerial emphasis student, I learned that Delta is not entirely run by the hard skills of its executive leaders. Delta excels because its leaders foster environments of growth and development. Furthermore, the way Delta values and rewards its employees creates motivation to compete within the company. The internal competition and relationships that Delta establishes are pillars of managerial excellence. From top to bottom, every employee at Delta identifies themselves with the company, leading to higher employee retention and greater customer service. I believe that any manager should achieve employee retention through company pride. If employees are not proud to work and positively represent their company, then managers have failed their duty.



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