Welcome to the second edition of the Consultant Corner. Sorry for the delay but had to take some time away for a vacation, milestone birthday and my daughter’s wedding this summer.

As I write this article, hurricane Earl is barreling down on the East Coast so the timing is perfect to discuss about our After-Hours Emergency Care Service. This topic always draws mixed reactions and comments from our travelers. For the most part everyone is satisfied with the service but it is a balance of expectations.

After our normal business hours (7pm CST), our phone system automatically rolls all calls to the After-Hours service so you only have to remember your dedicated reservation phone number – not a separate number. We are currently using two service providers that have extensive experience in this area. Most of their people are remote workers so they have the ability to add staff when call volume increases due to weather related events (such as a hurricane). Now it does not mean that they have an unlimited number of staff. During major weather events, it seems everyone wants to talk to the After-Hours service, so there may be a wait time.

Think about it; No one really calls the service with a routine request; it is always a problem or a last minute booking due to a change in schedule. By the nature of these types of calls, it will take longer to figure out the best way to resolve the issue. The goal for the After-Hours service is to get the problem resolved and the ticket issued as quickly as possible.

This is where the balance of expectations comes into play. Normally, when you do not need the service, you place a low value on the price that you would pay for the service, and when expectations are low. When your flight just got cancelled due to a major snow storm on the east coast, you would pay anything to get on a flight home and want the phone answered immediately. Of course, you are not the only one in that same boat, so you may encounter a wait time.

Other factors to consider are the policies that your company/travel manager may have put in since the After-Hours service is typically at a higher cost. Do you really want to call the service to book a trip for three weeks from now, when you can book it during normal business hours the next day and pay your regular transaction fee? The After-Hours service has access to your profile, booked and ticketed reservations, as well as your
company’s policy. But will they know you as well as your agent does when you talk to him/her every day for reservations? Honestly it will not be exactly the same, but they have access to all the same information about your company’s policies and standards.

There are additional policies that the After-Hours service follows such as getting approval for non-profiled travelers, or for an International reservation that is over $3000.00, and taking a credit card over the phone. These may be an inconvenience but it is protection for both you and your company so someone is not just booking reservations without approval. Each of these issues gets escalated according to the policies for your company to the management team at TravelFocus for final approval (Yes - they can reach us any time day and night – mostly night time on the weekends – just ask our Reservation Manager - Bonnie).

By the way, the busiest times to reach the After-Hours service is between the hours of 8pm CST and 12 Midnight during the week. On the weekends, it is steady but the bulk of the calls start coming in early Sunday morning as people remember about their early Monday morning flight. We know these patterns as we monitor their performance on a weekly basis based on call volume reports.

Finally, if you were not aware, all bookings each night are sent to us from the After-Hours service and we review each booking for follow-up and invoicing etc. the next day. We understand the expectations about providing After-Hours Emergency Service and we are constantly working with our providers to ensure that they are exceeding all of our expectations as well as yours. If you have any comments or thoughts that you would like to share on this topic, you can always reach me at dgorecki@travelfocus.com or 214-915-9066.

Next time, we will focus on our Vacation/Leisure department as I think everyone is tired of Stay Vacations and it is time to see the world as there are plenty of great deals out in the market. Thanks!

Dtg

David Gorecki
VP Operations
American Airlines rolls out fee for coach seats

American Airlines is introducing Express Seats (SM), the newest product offering under its Your Choice (SM) line of products and services that provide customers a way to purchase special services they value.

With Express Seats travelers can purchase seats in the first few rows of Coach, including bulkhead seats in that cabin. Additionally, customers who purchase an Express Seat are able to board with Group 1 of General Boarding for their flight, providing them the convenience of being among the first Coach customers on and off the plane.

Express Seats are available to all American Airlines customers and can be purchased exclusively via airport Self-Service Check-In machines anytime from 24 hours to 50 minutes prior to scheduled flight departure for travel wholly within the United States, including Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Introductory pricing for Express Seats begins at $19 per flight, with pricing based on distance. Here are some examples of introductory prices for Express Seats on popular American Airlines routes:

• $19 for St. Louis to Chicago O'Hare
• $29 for San Francisco to Dallas/Fort Worth
• $29 for Boston to Chicago O'Hare
• $39 for New York JFK to Los Angeles
• $39 for Chicago O'Hare to Honolulu

“Express Seats highlights American’s focus on offering customers what they value most,” said Virasb Vahidi – Chief Commercial Officer for American Airlines. “This is another great product under the Your Choice program that puts more travel choices in the customer’s hands.”

American still provides travelers with the option to pre-reserve other seats in the Coach Cabin at no charge. In addition, AAdvantage® elite status members, oneworld® elite status members and customers purchasing full-fare tickets will continue to have exclusive access to preferred seating, separate from Express Seats, on a complimentary basis. For more information about the Your Choice program and Express Seats, please visit www.aa.com/yourchoice.
Secure Flight Program

TSA Requirements are set to change November 1, 2010. As a reminder, the TSA requires the full name, date of birth and gender, as it appears on the traveler’s non-expired government issued photo ID that they plan to use for travel identification. This includes all passengers flying to/from/within/over the United States, and for all U.S. Operating Carriers.

TravelFocus has built an automation program that will prevent ticketing if the Secure Flight information is not present in the reservation. However, should ticketing be delayed it could affect the ticket price. Although, it will prevent debit memos by the airlines, that ultimately would be the responsibility of each client. In order to ensure all your travelers have this information in their profile, we strongly recommend that you continue to communicate this to your travelers.

FAA Downgrades Mexico’s Air-Safety Rating, Citing Lax Oversight

U.S. aviation regulators downgraded Mexico’s safety ranking, effectively restricting its airlines from partnering with American carriers or expanding service between the two countries. The decision, announced Friday afternoon by the Federal Aviation Administration, was prompted by concerns about lax Mexican government oversight of the country’s airlines.

The move is likely to have important economic and symbolic impact, according to U.S. and foreign airline-industry officials. Under the decision, Mexican airlines are restricted from codesharing—or using U.S. as well as Mexican flight numbers—on routes flown in conjunction with U.S. partners, including Delta Air Lines Inc. and AMR Corp.’s American Airlines.

Until the safety downgrade is removed, a process that usually takes at least several months, Mexican carriers also will be restricted from expanding their service to the U.S.

The FAA’s move to downgrade Mexico to Category 2 from Category 1 under the agency’s international safety assessment program also creates a political embarrassment a close U.S. ally. The last time the FAA took such a step was in late 2008, when it downgraded Israel and faulted its regulators for having a shortage of government inspectors. The FAA’s website still lists Israel in Category 2. The debate over Mexico’s downgrade was sensitive enough that officials from the FAA and the Department of Transportation sought White House concurrence, a U.S. industry official familiar with the matter said. A White House spokesman declined to comment.

The U.S. rankings aren’t intended to gauge individual airline safety systems or procedures, and aren’t directly tied to recent airline accidents or incidents. Instead, FAA safety experts assess the adequacy of laws,
FAA Downgrades Mexico’s Air-Safety Rating, Citing Lax Oversight

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regulations and day-to-day oversight of carriers by a specific government. Foreign regulators are briefed on the decision, and in most cases pledge to work with the FAA to correct deficiencies. In 2009, U.S. citizens made more than 5.2 million air trips to Mexico, down 10.6% from 2008, a drop in travel attributed to swine-flu concerns. In its announcement Friday, the FAA said Mexico “has been responsive” to the FAA’s concerns and “has made significant improvements in recent months,” but was “unable to fully comply with all of the [mandatory] international safety standards.”

Mexico’s Communications and Transportation Ministry said the FAA’s decision was prompted in part by questions about the training of regulators and inspections of airlines. Transport Minister Humberto Trevino said growth in Mexico’s airline industry over the past decade has outpaced the country’s safety-oversight programs, and said the FAA notified the Mexican government in January of its intentions. “We’re working hand-in-hand with the FAA on a strategy of corrective actions,” he said. Details of the FAA reviews that led to the decision aren’t released.

The agency typically doesn’t elaborate on its findings. That’s partly why such decisions have prompted controversy overseas. Critics in Latin America, Asia and other regions have complained that U.S. carriers are in a position to benefit by picking up additional traffic on certain routes. Other countries downgraded in the past few years by the FAA include Indonesia, Croatia, Ukraine and the Philippines. Many other countries also are listed by the FAA as deficient in safety oversight, though most of those didn’t have any airlines serving the U.S.

The decision to crack down on Mexico, a major trade partner with extensive air links to the U.S., surprised some airline officials. Local regulators apparently hadn’t indicated they were having trouble complying with FAA safety-oversight standards, as those in other countries have typically done. The FAA’s primary safety concern, according to one person briefed on the discussions, was the chronic shortage of government inspectors. As late as last week, Mexican officials presented a plan to hire dozens of additional inspectors. But in the end, according this person, the FAA determined that promises weren’t enough. An FAA team may return to Mexico and reassess the situation before the end of the year.

The Mexican situation, however, appears unusual because FAA safety officials—like their counterparts in Europe—generally try to avoid punishing countries where they see progress toward safety improvements. Often, threats of a downgrade are enough to prompt governments to shake up the leadership of their aviation
Continued FAA Downgrades Mexico’s Air-Safety Rating, Citing Lax Oversight

agencies and boost safety-oversight budgets. But this time the FAA opted for a stick rather than a carrot, suggesting that senior Mexican aviation officials miscalculated by overly relying on the FAA’s patience.

The FAA previously seemed poised to downgrade India and Thailand, two large and fast-growing aviation markets. But both countries avoided downgrades in the wake of extensive consultations with the FAA, and after promising to substantially step up oversight of carriers, hiring large numbers of additional inspectors and taking steps to ensure greater independence for their regulators. Since then, both countries have suffered high-profile accidents involving carriers they oversee. Atlanta-based Delta currently places its DL code on about 140 Aero Mexico flights a day, representing less than 1% of its global operations. Aero Mexico is a member of SkyTeam, the marketing group anchored by Delta and Air France-KLM SA.

If Delta is forced to drop the code shares, passengers who have tickets to fly under a Delta code on an Aero Mexico flight would have to be reticketed or could be rebooked on one of the U.S. carrier’s own flights. The FAA downgrade wouldn’t affect Aero Mexico putting its passengers on Delta flights under the code-share arrangement. A Delta spokesman said the carrier will remove its code from Aero Mexico’s flights, “will work proactively to reaccommodate any travelers affected by this change” and expects “minimal impact” to passengers. It reiterated that its own Mexico routes won’t be affected.

The FAA’s decision also is expected to negatively impact business for Mexicana, which may face a financial crunch and last year joined the Oneworld group, led by American’s parent. On Thursday, Canadian authorities seized two jets leased by Mexicana de Aviacion, as the company is known; fueling speculation the airline faces trouble in meeting its financial obligations. The airline attributed the seizure of the planes to a “misunderstanding.” US Airways and Continental could benefit from the changes, because of their extensive U.S.-Mexico services, and the impact on Delta could be muted by boosting business for its own flights to and from Mexico.

The move could also derail plans by Southwest Airlines Co. to offer its first international code share as a pact with Mexican low-cost operator Volaris. The arrangement was due to start later this year, some months behind schedule. Southwest didn’t immediately respond to a request for comment.

Study Cites U.S. Cities Targeting Travelers for Taxes

Business travelers face the highest taxes in Chicago, New York and Boston, but Portland, Ore., ranks highest as the city with the most taxes that specifically target travelers, according to research released on Thursday by the National Business Travel Association Foundation and Concur.

The study compiled data on taxes targeting car rental, hotel stays and meals in the top 50 U.S. travel destination cities. It found that, on average, travelers to those cities pay taxes 56 percent above the general sales tax level, and in Portland’s case, 144 percent above the general tax burden. Many of these taxes fund projects unrelated to travel, according to the study.

“The business and travel communities are increasingly concerned about the negative impact that taxes targeting travelers have on the greater travel industry and local economies,” NBTA executive director and
New Visual Brand Identity for the New United Airlines

Aug. 11, 2010 – United Airlines and Continental Airlines today revealed refinements to the visual branding for the new global airline that will result from the proposed merger between the two airlines. The new logo displays the combined company’s brand name in capital letters (UNITED) in a custom sans-serif font, joined with the global mark which has represented Continental’s brand image since 1991. A corresponding update of the combined airline’s aircraft livery will adopt Continental’s livery, colors and design, including its blue-gold-white globe image on the tail, combined with the new-style UNITED name on the fuselage. Both airlines have earned strong brand recognition in one of the world’s most visible and highly competitive businesses. The new visual identity builds upon the significant value of each airline’s current brand, while advancing the combined airline’s future brand image. For images of the new logo and livery, please visit UnitedContinentalMerger.com

Lowest Total Tax Burden Cities:
1. Fort Lauderdale, FL
2. Fort Myers, FL
3. Portland, OR
4. Detroit, MI
5. Honolulu, HI

When the overall tax burden—travel taxes combined with sales taxes—is considered, however, Portland actually has the third-lowest tax burden for travelers, according to the survey.

Highest Total Tax Burden Cities:
1. Chicago, IL
2. New York, NY
3. Boston, MA
4. Seattle, WA
5. Minneapolis, MN

Two Florida cities, Fort Lauderdale and Fort Myers, have the lowest overall tax burden. Detroit and Honolulu round out the top five for the lowest overall traveler tax burden. Travelers pay the highest overall taxes in Chicago, New York, Boston, Seattle and Minneapolis, the survey reported.

Travel Vacations – Experience the South - Savannah, GA

The Gastonian, consists of two adjoining Regency-Italianate-style mansions built in 1868. A four-diamond bed and breakfast inn, recognized by Conde Nast Traveler Magazine as one of the finest places to stay in the world. All guest rooms have working fireplaces.

Dallas: 800-627-2987
Chicago: 800-821-1932
London Taxis Ranked Nicest, Most Knowledgeable

London taxis, with their friendly drivers who actually know where they are going, are ranked best in the world, according to an annual taxi poll. The survey by travel website hotels.com found London taxis, despite being the most expensive, beat rivals across the globe to head the list for the third consecutive year, scoring a total of 59 percent in votes on several categories by travelers.

London taxi drivers were voted both friendliest and most knowledgeable. Drivers in the English capital must pass a rigorous examination called The Knowledge to earn their taxi license. New York’s yellow taxis came second in the list, scoring 27 percent which was up 10 percentage points from last year even though Manhattan’s cab drivers tied with Parisian taxi drivers as the rudest.

Travelers said New York had the most available taxis.

Cabbies in Rome were voted the worst drivers in the world with almost one in 10 travelers thinking the Italian capital had the world’s worst taxi drivers when it came to the quality of driving.

“Traveling by taxi is one of the first experiences that many travelers have upon arrival in a new city. In fact, the research found that cabs are by far the most popular method of traveling from the airport to their hotel,” a spokesman for hotels.com said in a statement.

The global poll scored city based taxis for their levels of cleanliness, value, quality of driving, knowledge of the area, friendliness, safety and availability.

Rounding out the top five were Tokyo with a total score of 26 percent, Berlin with 17 percent, and Bangkok famed for its tuk-tuks scoring 14 percent. Madrid’s taxis were ranked sixth in the poll, followed by Copenhagen and Dublin with 11 percent and Frankfurt and Paris with 10 percent.

Taxis in Sydney fell short of the top 10, scoring badly in the areas of value for money, availability and knowledge of the area. The survey for hotels.com, part of the Expedia group, was conducted among over 1,900 travelers between May 11-28 this year.
Frontier Airlines to move Houston flights to Hobby

Frontier Airlines, a unit of Republic Airways Holdings Inc., said Monday it will move its Houston flights to William P. Hobby Airport from George Bush Intercontinental Airport beginning Nov. 18.

Hobby is closer to downtown Houston and has a recently renovated terminal. Southwest Airlines currently operates most of the flights out of Hobby.

Denver-based Frontier said that customers who are booked on Frontier flights to Houston Intercontinental on or after Nov. 18 will automatically be rebooked on flights to Hobby.

UAE: BlackBerry crackdown will affect visitors too

The United Arab Emirates’ looming crackdown on BlackBerry services will extend to foreign visitors, putting the government’s concerns over the smart phones in direct conflict with the country’s ambitions to be a business and tourism haven.

The Emirates’ telecoms regulator said that travelers to the city-state of Dubai and the important oil industry center of Abu Dhabi will — like the 500,000 local subscribers — have to do without BlackBerry e-mail, messaging and Web services starting Oct. 11, even when they carry phones issued in other countries. The handsets themselves will still be allowed for phone calls.

Emirati authorities say the move is based on security concerns because BlackBerry data are automatically shipped to company computers abroad, where it is difficult for local authorities to monitor for illegal activity or abuse.

Critics of the crackdown say it is also a way for the country’s conservative government to further control content it deems politically or morally objectionable.

About 100,000 travelers pass through Dubai’s airport every day, making it the busiest in the Middle East. The new restrictions could leave time-pressed business travelers hurrying through, many of them changing planes for other destinations, without access to their e-mail or the Web.

“I think it’s a very big step back. All developed countries in the world have it. Why should we not?” said Emirati BlackBerry user Maisoon al-Iskandarani, 24, who works at an international bank in Dubai. “How are you going
to stay in touch with your clients and colleagues?”
In Washington, U.S. State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley called such technological restrictions “a move in the wrong direction.”

“We’re going to clarify with the UAE what’s behind this announcement, but we think it sets a dangerous precedent,” Crowley told reporters. “It is our view that you should be opening up societies to these new technologies that have the opportunity to empower people.” Crowley told The Associated Press, however, that diplomats and other officials needing to travel to the region will continue to do so, even if they need to use regular cell phones rather than BlackBerry messaging services.

The Paris-based press-freedom group Reporters Without Borders urged the government to lift its ban and reach a compromise “that does not limit the freedom of the Emirati population. Device maker Research in Motion Ltd. said it “respects both the regulatory requirements of government and the security and privacy needs of corporations and consumers,” but does not disclose details of discussions with regulators in any of the more than 175 countries where it operates. The Canadian company defended its security system as “widely accepted by security conscious customers and governments around the world.”

The UAE contends some BlackBerry features operate outside the country’s laws, “causing judicial, social and national security concerns.” At the heart of their concerns is the way the devices handle data, which get encrypted and routed through RIM’s servers overseas. The automatic encryption makes BlackBerry data far more difficult, if not impossible, for authorities to monitor.

The Emirates’ ambassador to the U.S., Yousef al-Otaiba, said in a statement that it was merely asking RIM to comply with its regulations — just as RIM does with laws in the U.S. and other countries. The statement said the UAE has been in talks with RIM for several years without success.

New ESTA fee for international travelers to the U.S.

Starting September 8, 2010 international passengers traveling to the United States under the Visa Waiver Program will be required to pay a fee of US$14 for the compulsory ESTA (Electronic System for Travel Authorization) application or renewal prior to travel.

Revenue from the new fee will be used to cover operational costs for administering the system and to promote U.S. travel. Travelers are encouraged to apply for travel authorization 72 hours prior to entering the U.S. by air or sea. Once approved, authorizations are generally valid for multiple entries into the US for up to two years or until the applicant’s passport expires, at which point travelers will be required to pay the fee again.
All payments for electronic travel authorization applications must be made by credit card or debit card at the
time of application. Accepted forms of payment include MasterCard, VISA, American Express and Discover
cards. Travelers with no confirmed plans to visit the U.S. can still apply for or renew ESTA before September
8 at no fee.

Registration and further information is available at: https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov.

Countries in the Visa Waiver Program:
Andorra, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brunei, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary,
Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway,
Portugal, San Marino, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom.

Southwest Airlines Rapid Rewards Welcomes Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide, Inc. Onboard

Southwest Airlines announced August 18th the addition of Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide, Inc. as a
new Partner of the carrier’s frequent flyer program, Rapid Rewards. Rapid Rewards Members now have the
option to earn a half (0.5) Rapid Rewards credit for each eligible stay at one of Starwood’s global hotel brands
including: St. Regis®, The Luxury Collection®, W®, Westin®, Le Meridien®, Sheraton®, Four Points by
Sheraton®, Aloft®, and Element(SM). In order to earn credits, Rapid Rewards Members must be enrolled in
the Starwood Preferred Guest® (SPG®) program and select Southwest Airlines Rapid Rewards as their
earning preference. Additionally, SPG members have the option to transfer Starpoints® to Rapid Rewards
credits. For every 1,500 Starpoints transferred, Members earn one credit—SPG members who transfer at
least 20,000 Starpoints get a valuable bonus of an additional three and a half (3.5) credits.

In honor of the new partnership, Four Points by Sheraton has also launched a special limited time offer.
Between August 18 and September 30, Members who register for the promotion and book an eligible stay at
over 150 hotels globally will earn one Rapid Rewards credit. Full details on this Four Points offer will be
announced to Rapid Rewards Members today.

“This new partnership with Starwood Hotels & Resorts is a major enhancement to our Rapid Rewards
program and something that our Members have told us they wanted,” said Ryan Green, Southwest’s Senior
Director of Loyalty & Partnerships. “We’re constantly looking for ways to bring more Partners onboard and
give our loyal Members more options to earn Rapid Rewards credits.”

“SPG has worked hard to develop new ways to enhance our loyal guests’ entire travel experience,” said Chris
Holdren, Senior Vice President of Starwood Preferred Guest. “We are thrilled to partner with Southwest
Airlines to give SPG members more opportunities to turn their hotel stays into travel rewards.”

It is fast and easy to earn free travel through Rapid Rewards. Rapid Rewards Members earn credits by flying
or using the program’s Partners. It takes just eight roundtrips, or 16 credits, to qualify for an Award. However,
Members can accelerate their earnings by using the Southwest Airlines Rapid Rewards Credit Card from
Chase, doing business with any of the airline’s other Partners, or by purchasing Southwest’s Business
Select fares when flying. Plus, once it’s earned, Southwest Airlines allows the Member to transfer the Award
to anyone. The Award is free but subject to the U.S. government-imposed September 11th Security Fee of up
to $10 roundtrip.