

Miami Airport Steps Up Its Social Media Efforts

By [Benét J. Wilson](#) November 17, 2014

By Benét J. Wilson / Published November 17th, 2014



Passengers at MIA using passport screening machines. All photos courtesy of Miami-Dade Aviation Department

While Miami International Airport was a late bloomer when it came to adopting social media, its efforts have taken off, with the facility winning a major industry award.

The airport was one of four winners of [Simplifying's Best Emerging Airline/Airport on Social Media in 2013](#), a mere four months into its efforts. And it was number three among Mashable's list of [the 20 best airports according Twitter](#).

Dickie Davis is the airport's director of public and customer relations who oversees all social media. The airport launched its [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) accounts on June 13, 2013. "We were active with phone calls, letters and emails, but not social media," she said. "Now we're letters on steroids with social media and have more than made up for our late blooming."

Social media just wasn't on the airport's radar, said Greg Chin, Miami's communications director. "We had a lot of other priorities at the airport, and we didn't keep up with the rapid expansion of

social media and we should have,” he said. “But when the decision was made to jump in, we had to catch up. Social media has exploded into something that’s a must-have to communicate with large numbers of customers.”

Once the decision was made, it was obvious that the airport would use Facebook and Twitter, because those are the most-used platforms, said Davis. “We are also on Instagram, which has boomed from 300 to 3,000 followers in a month, thanks to a college intern who immersed herself in it,” he said.

Twitter is fast-paced, and it’s great because aviation happens so quickly, said Davis. “Twitter gives us a unique opportunity to respond back and provide exquisite customer care,” she said.

Miami International is one of a handful of airports on Twitter with a verified badge. “When we first started, I was stunned at how many entities were purporting to be our airport. You know how important it is to get out information, but in a crisis, it’s especially important to be the official voice of Miami International Airport,” she said. “We wanted that verification so that customers knew we were the real voice of the airport.”



Just because an airport has 100,000 followers, it doesn’t mean they’re engaged, said Davis. “We’re trying to figure out how to do it 24/7. I used to do it myself, but I now have a team of three. If you want to do it right, you have to pay attention,” she said. “Six months ago, a guy tweeted us and several other airports just to see who would be the first to answer. It was us.”

Miami’s social media strategy is to be there for passengers and tell the airport’s better stories, said Davis. “Our goal is to offer a better experience for passengers in our large airport,” she said. “We

also get so much new service here in Miami that we want to make sure that our story gets out and we can't always depend on the media to do that.”

Ken Pyatt is the airport's deputy director, responsible for overseeing all aspects of airport operations, security, and facilities management. “I'm impressed with the amplification of our efforts using social media. On social media, we can respond quickly and even find the person who issued the tweet,” he said. “The customer is impressed and ends up tweeting to thousands of people about their customer experience service at our airport.”

Even if there is a negative comment, the airport can still turn it around by how it reacts via social media, said Pyatt. “When you respond quickly, people don't expect it. You don't have to spend thousands of dollars to turn things around. Negative publicity happens when you don't deal with it quickly,” he said. “Sometimes it's just a matter of showing up, apologizing and offering to help.”

Davis offered the example of what happened when D.J. Walshy Fire (@walshyfire) complained via Twitter about a lack of healthy food options at the airport. “After seeing his tweet, we had a health-platter at the IceBox Café named after him within the hour, calling the ‘Irie Green Plate,’ which has since become a special at the restaurant,” she said.

The suitably impressed D.J. Walshy Fire tweeted to his 22,600 fans: “Mia airport completely overwhelmed with your customer service. Truly working at making this the best airport in America @iflyMIA.”

There are always going to be issues at an airport, said Pyatt. “It's not like working 9 to 5 at an office job. We're on 24 hours a day, seven days a week,” he said. “We can give real-time information that passengers can use to dispel rumors.”

The airport's social media team is made up of three people, said Davis. The team monitors its social media accounts — including Facebook, Twitter Instagram and the website — from 8:30 a.m. to midnight, she added.

Davis lauded other aviation companies doing great on social media, including American Airlines, WestJet and Heathrow Airport. “For all of us, the goal is to let people see we're a real place with a heart and soul,” she said.