

SELLING THE PUBLIC AIR TRANSPORTATION

AVIATION has passed through two stages and now has entered the third. While we think of this as the commercial aviation age, a century from now the world will think of this period as the time when commercial application of flying had hardly begun.

Although airplanes have been developed to the points of safety and relative economy, there remains the problem of selling and re-selling individuals on transportation in the air.

Those who think of aviation in terms of war-time flying—and many do—have ample reason to keep one foot on the ground. They continue to think of flying as belonging to one of the first two stages. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

The first of these may be termed the pre-war stage. Airplanes then were little more than power driven kites. Piano wires of sometimes doubtful strength served in place of the fine stream-lined wires on biplanes today. No wonder only careless youths were willing to trust their lives aloft!

Then came World War aviation. Engines began to display a certain degree of efficiency and trustworthiness. Those motors when compared with the excellent engines now used to power transport planes become very unreliable indeed. Some of the best war-time motors were rotary in type. The entire engine revolved! They could not last under high speed operation. Some of these motors had no piston rings, but utilized small copper rings much like the leather washer in a bicycle pump. There was so little compression that the propeller would continue to turn even after the pilot had cut off the ignition.



by
J. L. Maddux

President, Maddux Air Lines

That was scarcely more than 10 years ago. We now have entered the age of commercialization of travel in the air. It has ceased to be a "game" and has become a "business." It will become a bigger business only as the public patronizes it.

How can the public be induced in large numbers to fly from city to city, then to fly again, again and again?

I fear the safety element is being over-emphasized. Those engaged in the manufacture of airplanes and transportation assume air travel is safe, but many follow the assumption with long arguments to prove the point. If air travel has become an accepted means of travel it should be sold on the same basis any other transportation is sold. That is, on its economy, comfort, speed and dependability.

The safety element need not be ignored, however. Published figures of performance, statements of on-time arrivals, information concerning the care taken to insure on-time arrival; these things carry the connotation of safety without continually driving in the thought in a manner which suggests it to be only a half-truth.

Air transportation companies stand on the threshold of a large volume of business. The volume must be developed much as the railroads increased passenger traffic. The temporary affluence of some companies possessing valuable mail contracts is passing and airplanes are assuming their place in the general transportation scheme alongside trains, stages and steamships. The whole public becomes the market.

Air lines first began seriously to bid for the public's confidence and patronage shortly after



Underwood & Underwood

New movable canopy runway at Grand Central Air Terminal, Glendale, California.



Pochatan Studio

Lounging room, Pilot's
Hotel, Municipal Air-
port, Tulsa, Okla.

Colonel Lindbergh's trans-Atlantic flight. The business in its early development has been largely a gamble. The air transportation industry has had no precedent on which to predicate plans. There has been no aviation traffic history to study. That history is now being written that our successors may profit.

We could not pattern plans after the European methods. The United States government offered no subsidies except in the form of mail contracts to a limited number of companies and certain other aids of less material nature. European air lines have had the benefit of direct government subsidies, use of government pilots and other similar assistance. American companies generally have been required to develop their own resources.

Large sums have become available through public subscription for develop-

ment of the better companies. In some instances the public has not discriminated, in fact has been unable to discriminate. Whether the investments prove their worth by returning profits to investors depends upon use of the facilities by paying customers.

To induce potential customers to come to our air depots and later to use our planes in business and pleasure becomes the next important problem.

It has been our experience that familiarity breeds contempt for the supposed dangers that exist in the air. One aged man of my acquaintance recently went from San Diego to Seattle by boat. He had taken this means to escape several train changes, thinking by this means he could avoid the discomfort of moving an injured knee more often than might be necessary.

Rough weather on the voyage north caused him to decide to seek another way of returning to southern California. During his stay in Washington he visited some of the flying fields several times and finally became a daily visitor at one large airport. The casualness with which younger people entered the big passenger planes and flew away over the mountains impressed him. His decision was not wholly unexpected. He flew from Seattle to San Francisco by one line and from San Francisco to San Diego in two of our planes.

"I never enjoyed a more pleasant journey," he said later. He explained that the roomy passenger cabin of the large tri-motored planes gave him as much comfort as he had experienced in other vehicles, and by flying he traveled

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Luggage being
unloaded by
attendants at
Malmö,
Sweden.

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from Seattle to San Diego in about one-third the time required for ground travel between the two cities.

I have heard since he is "saving his pennies," as he confided to a friend, for a transcontinental flight.

Not all passengers are induced as easily to enter a plane for their first flight, however. Our salesmen meet various degrees of resistance among the people they solicit.

The business of selling air transportation calls for a tremendous amount of personal contact. Campaigns in the newspapers and magazines, direct-mail literature, window displays and radio talks serve well enough to arouse general interest. These messages draw many people to the airports. The final appeal, the "sign-on-the-dotted-line-for-a-ticket," is often made during a man to man contact.

Our approach to the public has many ramifications. We send our representatives into offices and business houses seeking customers and we provide for the comfort and entertainment of those people when they evidence sufficient interest to visit the airport. As our depots develop, the public will find in them every convenience to be found in a railway depot, with the addition of entertainment.

We had expected a "long pull" in our quest for customers. We realized much effort would be expended before a volume of business would respond. The organization brought together was conceived on a basis of experience and permanence. It is composed largely of two types of men, those with excellent aviation experience and those with railroad and steamship traffic experience. All efforts of both groups are directed toward the "selling and keeping sold" of the public.

Several methods serve to arouse initial interest. The radio and general publicity combined with both specific and institutional advertising in the daily papers are the foundation. Merchandising tieups with newspapers, wherein the papers purchase transportation at a discount and give it in return for subscriptions, succeed in getting many into the air. A similar arrangement with department stores and other large business organizations not only gives us wide advertising but also increases receipts for the local passenger business. Firms purchase tickets at a discount and give them out to clerks as rewards for efficiency, increased volume of sales, etc.

Passenger business over the longer lines must come first from individuals enjoying larger incomes and from those whose duties require speedy travel between cities. This is manifest because

present tariffs do not permit the man of small wages to use air travel. It is because of this economic fact that our salesmen call daily on professional people and others influential in the community seeking to sell them on the advantages of travel by air.

I find it difficult to discriminate between methods of obtaining new and repeat business, except that one trip in the air usually breaks down considerably the resistance. Immediately following a journey between any two points our sales organization sends a letter of appreciation to the traveler, including a folder explaining the scenic beauties and enjoyment to be had on other routes.

These are in a sense routine sales methods, yet they have not been applied in these forms generally by air transportation companies. We have endeavored to personalize flying, carrying to the customer the idea that we are interested in his particular convenience in going from city to city. This is further carried out by the operation between Los Angeles and San Francisco of two types of service. A non-stop express plane on which is charged a slightly higher tariff carries those who wish to spend the minimum time in the air. Another plane stops at intermediate points to permit local travel.

We do not consider our obligation ended with the sale of a ticket. It only commences at that point. The passenger who trusts his life and his time to our equipment becomes in a sense a ward for whom we must care until we deposit him in the center of his destination city.

Efforts are directed not only toward providing for his safety, but also for his comfort and *entertainment*. The entertainment feature is important, especially for those in the air for the first time.

The passenger reaches the airport either in his own car or in an automobile supplied to bring him from the metropolitan area to the depot. In either case, his physical troubles cease at the point of first contact. Employees take his baggage and check it through. Until plane time, to paraphrase the railroad term, he wanders through the depot or otherwise cares for himself.

Then the plane is announced. In the case of departure from Grand Central Air Terminal he walks through the covered depot down to a covered arcade—a canopied, glass-sided tube—directly to the open door of the plane. He suffers no inconvenience from sun, wind, dust or rain—or from the blast of the ship's propellers. For him have been eliminated jay walking hazards and weather discomforts.

And in the air, what? Deep, upholstered wicker chairs with high arms on which to rest elbows; a couch at the rear of the passenger's cabin for the weary; current magazines and other literature; a wash basin, cold water for drinking, toilet facilities; luncheon of fruits and sandwiches; information at intervals from the mate; and, above all, two pilots who sit in plain view of the passengers.

The fact that the pilots are visible is important. Usually the "first timer" in the air feels some nervousness at intervals, but when he looks forward and sees the plane captain (first pilot) and his mate (second pilot) conversing and possibly laughing over some joke, he realizes danger not only is not real, but also is not really apparent. His fears are ill-founded, for no reputable commercial air transport company dispatches a plane when danger in any guise threatens. The weather man furnishes complete information of conditions ahead and no pilot will take up a plane which is weak in any part.

At intervals the mate leaves his post to inquire whether passengers are comfortable, to ask if he can do anything for them. This puts at ease any who thought themselves out of their proper element. He points out interesting landmarks, explains that the pilot is flying at an altitude of 9,000 feet to take advantage of a 30-mile tail wind, tells them other interesting things about the route.

Usually, however, both the captain and mate (who is thoroughly qualified to handle the big plane) sit in their cabin, going about their routine business of going places and arriving there on schedule. If they are slow, they speed up a bit; or if they are ahead of time they slow down.

At the termination of the run one of the pilots asks passengers if they have enjoyed the trip. The majority not only confess to having had both pleasure and comfort, but also ask the captain's name. Later they boast of having "flown from San Francisco to Los Angeles with Captain So-and-so."

Nearly 100 percent of those who fly once in a transport plane become converts to air travel. Every effort is made to provide for this state of mind. From take-off to landing the pilots fly the big ships on an even keel, turning in large arcs and not banking sharply, avoiding cloudy areas and rain squalls; for we sell transportation, not thrills.

The day of aviation thrills insofar as the public personally is concerned has passed. It now is fast, dependable routine transportation.