

# Building Loyalty and Enhancing Customer Care During Travel Disruptions

New data and market insights for airlines, airports, agents  
and travel providers

Author:



## Executive Summary:

*The 2014 winter travel season saw 136,649 flights cancelled across the U.S. between December 1st and March 31st, according to FlightView data. This year, travelers are expecting providers to reimagine the services they offer during delays and cancellations.*

Disruptions are an unavoidable reality in the travel industry, especially during the winter travel season. And in most instances, there's very little airlines, airports and travel providers can do to prevent delays and cancellations from happening. While most travelers understand this, there's a widening and potentially damaging gap between how travelers expect disruptions to be handled, and what service providers are actually doing.

This FlightView report details feedback from more than 2,000 travelers on what they want from airlines, airports, agents and travel providers during major travel disruptions. The report provides insight on:

1. [Why providers need to reimagine the rebooking process](#)
2. [The negative ramifications of poor flight information](#)
3. [The market opportunity for travel agents and service providers](#)
4. [Strategies for better leveraging travel data](#)
5. [Ideas to improve the airport experience during disruptions](#)

### Survey Demographics

Total respondents: 2,113

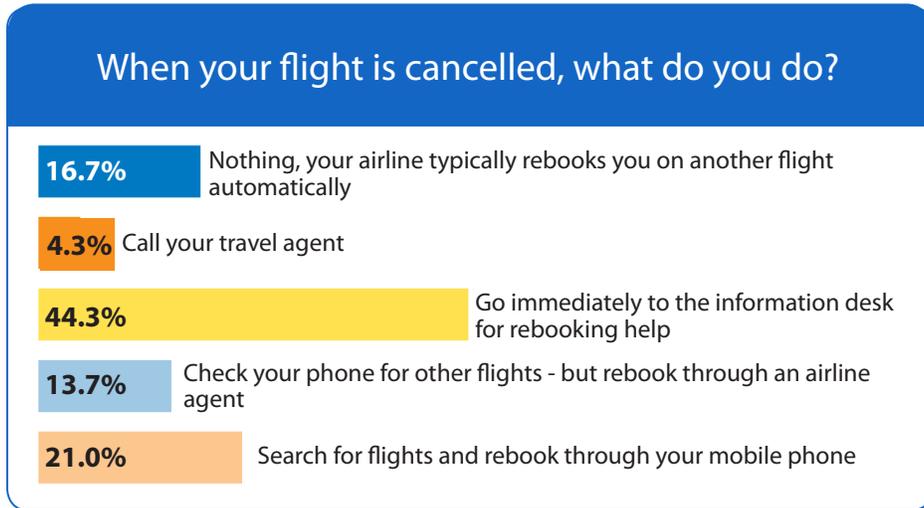
Respondent breakdown: 37% business travelers, 63% leisure travelers.

Survey execution: Launched and completed in September of 2014. The survey was distributed to users of FlightView's mobile app.

## Stuck in the Past: Travel Rebooking Process Falls Behind

Despite that 90 percent of travelers carry a mobile device, [according to SITA](#), and the skyrocketing adoption of self-service technologies throughout the travel ecosystem, the travel rebooking process is stuck in the past.

When a flight is cancelled, nearly half of all travelers still go to an airline agent for help rebooking. Only 21 percent of travelers search for new flights and rebook on their mobile devices.



FlightView’s research shows that travelers want airlines, agents and travel management companies to completely revamp how they manage flight cancellations and significant delays.

In fact, during a travel disruption, 85 percent of travelers would prefer having multiple rebooking options sent to their phones so they can pick the itinerary that works best for them – instead of the airline, agent or service provider just automatically assigning a new flight. More than 93 percent of travelers would also value being asked about their re-booking preferences (first flight out, direct only, shortest travel time, send options, etc.) when they first buy their ticket.

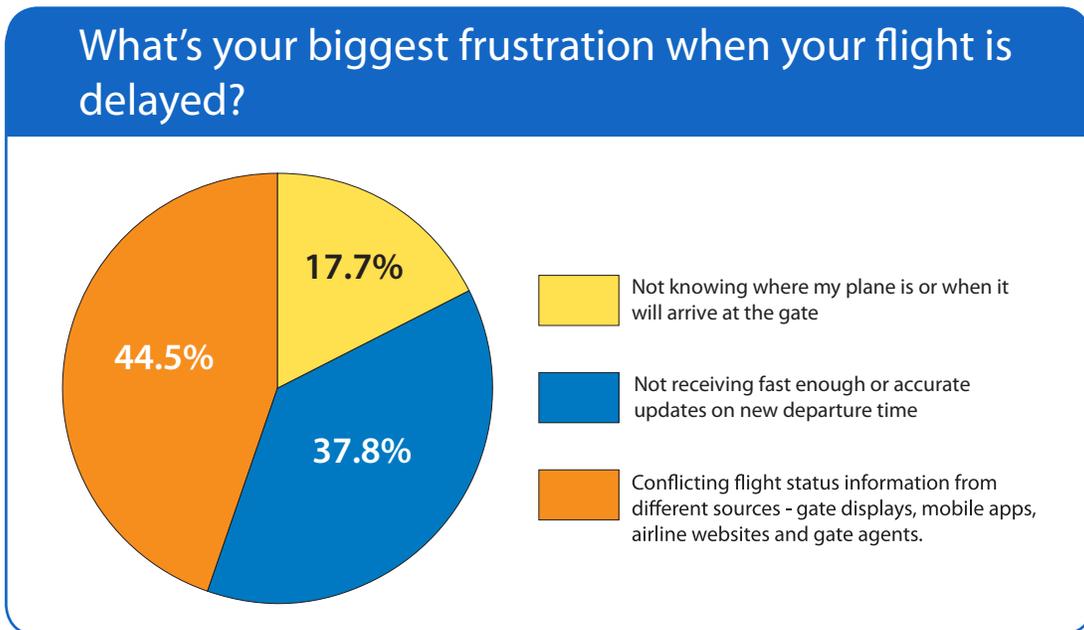
Today, however, very few travel providers are equipped to personalize the re-booking process in this manner – especially during major travel disruptions. While the industry as a whole has made significant advancements on the mobile front, offerings are still mostly focused on information access – via push notifications or self-service. And that doesn’t sit very well with travelers, who regularly experience more sophisticated functionality on mobile devices in their everyday lives.

These gaps – both in terms of how travelers are rebooked during cancellations, and the lack of two-way mobile communication – present an immense competitive opportunity for airlines, online travel agents and service providers. For airlines, who travelers expect to be the first to provide preference-based rebooking, such an offering could have lasting, positive ramifications on customer satisfaction. For online travel agents and service providers, any ability to provide options to their travelers as part of the rebooking process would help them extend their reach beyond the initial planning process and increase the stickiness of their services throughout the trip.

## Poor Flight Info Wreaks Havoc on Travel Plans and Disrupts Duty-of-Care

While travelers understand that delays and cancellations are part of the travel experience – and often unavoidable -- very few travelers are satisfied with the flight information they are provided during delays:

- 44% of travelers said their biggest frustration when their flight is delayed was receiving conflicting flight status information from different sources – like gate displays, mobile apps, airline websites, travel services and gate agents.
- 38% said their biggest frustration was not receiving fast enough or accurate updates on the new departure time.
- 18% said their biggest frustration was not knowing where their airplane was currently located or when it would arrive at the gate.



Somewhat surprisingly, the issue of conflicting flight information has become more problematic over the past few years. In a [2012 FlightView study](#) that polled travelers on the same question, only 34 percent of travelers named conflicting flight information as their number one frustration during a delay – 10 percent less than today.

Poor flight information is one of the top detractors to customer experience. When travelers don't have the information they need – or worse, when they have wrong or conflicting data – they can't take action. And that causes a ripple effect that extends well beyond just the traveler – it impacts family, work, travel reservations, service providers and more.

While these findings aren't very favorable for airlines, they open the door for online travel agents and managed service providers to really differentiate their offerings – if, of course, they can improve upon the flight information status quo. Travelers want to know the instant something changes so they can proactively take action. The providers that inform their customers first via mobile and alerts, and proactively adjust their customers' plans when disruptions occur, will earn repeat loyalty and business.

For travel agents and business travel departments, there's also the issue of duty-of-care. Organizations need to know where their employees are at all times, otherwise the businesses' risk and liability increases. Tracking business travelers' whereabouts is critical, for example, in the event that political unrest or a natural disaster occurs; it's the organization's responsibility to return the traveler home safely.

Last year the Global Business Travelers Association (GBTA) surveyed [U.S. and U.K. travelers on their perception of their employers' travel safety program](#). The results were eye-opening:

- 80% think their company has a legal obligation to ensure their safety while traveling abroad for business
- 52% would consider legal action if they were not supported properly
- 46% work for firms with no clear travel security policies
- 36% have little confidence that their firms would provide correction information during overseas emergencies

The data speaks for itself: it's critical for organizations to stay informed of the status of their employees' flights and any changes in travel plans that may occur due to disruptions.

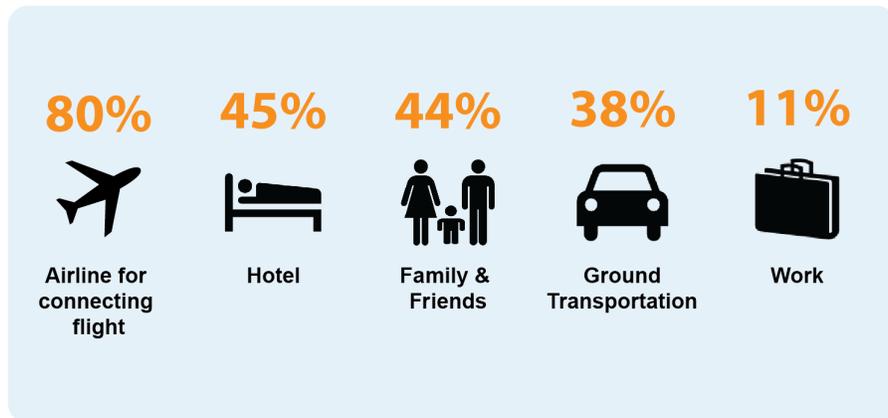
## The Future of Travel Data: Connected Information Sharing

Beyond improved transparency and communication, travelers are also expecting providers to proactively push real-time flight information downstream. More than 75 percent of travelers said they want the relevant parties affected by their flight (like hotels and ground transportation) automatically alerted when a change or delay occurs. Among the travelers surveyed, when there is a change in plans:

- 45% want their hotel automatically notified
- 43% want updates sent to friends and family
- 38% want ground transportation to be notified
- 11% want their work updated

Connected information-sharing has the potential to make the entire travel experience easier and more efficient – for both travelers and service providers.

## When your itinerary changes, who would you like the airline to automatically notify?



### Improving the Airport Experience During Delays

At airports, customer satisfaction immediately takes a hit when significant flight delays occur. Outside of better communicating flight information, what else can airports do to improve the terminal experience when flights are significantly delayed?

- 37% of travelers said the number one thing that would improve their airport experience in the event of a delay or cancellation was free Wi-Fi
- 31% said that access to airline lounges would most improve their experience
- 18% said digital displays that visually show the location of their airplane would best improve their experience
- 10% indicated coupons and discounts for shops and restaurants would be the best way to improve the airport experience

Regardless of how long a delay is expected, airlines and airports need to provide real-time, accurate flight information and proactively update customers when changes occur. Also, when flights are significantly delayed, providing customers with the amenities they need to be productive (e.g. readily available desks, power outlets and free WiFi) and entertained (e.g. easily accessible shops and restaurants and coupons for them) goes a long way in boosting their satisfaction and keeping loyal, life-long customers.

## Recommendations for Improving Customer Care During Travel Disruptions

Where should airlines, airports, agents and travel management companies go from here?

1. **Transform the re-booking process during disruptions.** It's bad enough for travelers that their flight was cancelled. The last thing they want is to be automatically slotted on a flight that doesn't work for their plans. Travel providers need to start exploring how to implement more personalized, preference-based re-booking, preferably on mobile for easy access while traveling.
2. **Invest in accurate, consistent flight information on every channel.** Accurate, consistent flight data is the backbone of the day-of-travel. When travelers don't have the information they need – or worse, when they have wrong or conflicting data – they can't take action. And that causes a ripple effect that extends well beyond just the traveler.
3. **Provide more in-trip value to customers through mobile technology.** From more comprehensive real-time flight information and speedy alerts to more sophisticated self-service technology, improving in-trip mobile offerings is the number one way travel providers can increase their stickiness and market share. In fact, in an earlier FlightView survey from this year, more than 85 percent of travelers said they would return to the non-airline provider that they purchased their ticket from if they were offered more valuable information during their trip. For Online Travel Agents specifically, the most important factors influencing in-trip usage of their mobile properties includes the strength of flight information updates, the usefulness and availability of day-of-travel information and overall usability.
4. **Share information with downstream travel providers.** Not only is it important to provide your travelers with quick updates to itinerary changes, but providers can add significant value by distributing these updates on their behalf to other service providers across the travel chain. Connected information-sharing has the potential to make everything smoother and more efficient – from picking up a rental car and checking-in to a hotel to making dinner reservations.
5. **Focus on the customer experience.** When travelers get stuck, or are significantly delayed, customer satisfaction levels fall instantly -- but they don't have to. Airlines and airports need to do a better job enhancing the terminal experience when customers are stuck at the airport. This includes providing better amenities to foster productivity (free and reliable WiFi, charging stations, work space, access to lounges, etc.) and entertainment (personalized offers for restaurants and shops and wayfinding functionality).

## Next Up



**Online Travel Agents , Meta-Search and Managed Travel Providers:** [Learn how to increase market share and customer loyalty by maximizing in-trip and day-of-travel engagement.](#)



**Airlines:** [Check out new strategies for catering to the connected traveler and enhancing the in-flight experience.](#)



**Airports:** [Get real insights from more than 2,000 travelers on how to improve the airport experience.](#)

### About FlightView:

FlightView, the top provider of day-of-travel information and services for the aviation and travel industries, is at the forefront of helping airlines and airports increase customer satisfaction, retention and revenue. FlightView's customer list has grown to include over 120 airports, several major and mid-sized airlines and other travel related companies who employ FlightView information in digital displays, Web and mobile sites, native apps, and other technologies. For more information, visit [www.flightview.com](http://www.flightview.com).

### Contact Us:

FlightView  
55 Chapel St., Suite 103  
Newton, MA 02458  
[www.flightview.com](http://www.flightview.com)

Katherine Wellman  
VP of Marketing & Product Management  
[kwellman@flightview.com](mailto:kwellman@flightview.com)  
(617) 202-0480