

BRITISH AIRWAYS

Visit Mum

The Jay Chiat Awards 2014



Summary

A Ticket to Visit Mum is the story of how one mother and her son were able to capture the hearts of everyone living away from home. For British Airways, it's a story of defying conventions in a category wrought with clichés and overly rational, price and product driven messaging.

We brought together the various disciplines in our industry to solve a critical business problem – how do you get more people to fly on BA from North America. The client and data analysts discovered a huge business opportunity to India, while ethnographers and planners worked in the community to get a unique perspective on the audience. This translated into a creative idea that touched people on a deeply emotional level and a media execution that reached millions.

The Visit Mum platform not only reversed BA's fortunes on one of its most important routes, but set a precedent that would change the way BA approached retail marketing for years to come.



The Backstory

In the UK, BA is the market leader, the national flag carrier with the gall to tell Brits to stay home and support the Olympics rather than fly somewhere exotic on holiday.

In North America, BA is a considerably smaller fish known for one thing: flying to London. They do this well – transatlantic routes to London represent ~70% of BA's total revenue from North America.

There was just one problem. UK bound traffic was not forecast to grow at a significant rate in 2013 (1.8% according to IATA) and the competition was just getting tougher with every airline – including the newly partnered Delta/Virgin Atlantic – focused on a piece of the transatlantic pie. The 10% revenue growth target set for BA in North America seemed improbable at best.

The business challenge at the beginning of 2013 was clear: to grow revenue for North America we needed to win over new audiences travelling to destinations outside of the UK.



Follow the Money

We started our search for this new audience by entrenching ourselves with the statisticians and econometricians in BA's revenue management team. With their guidance and our analysts' brilliance, the numbers started talking.

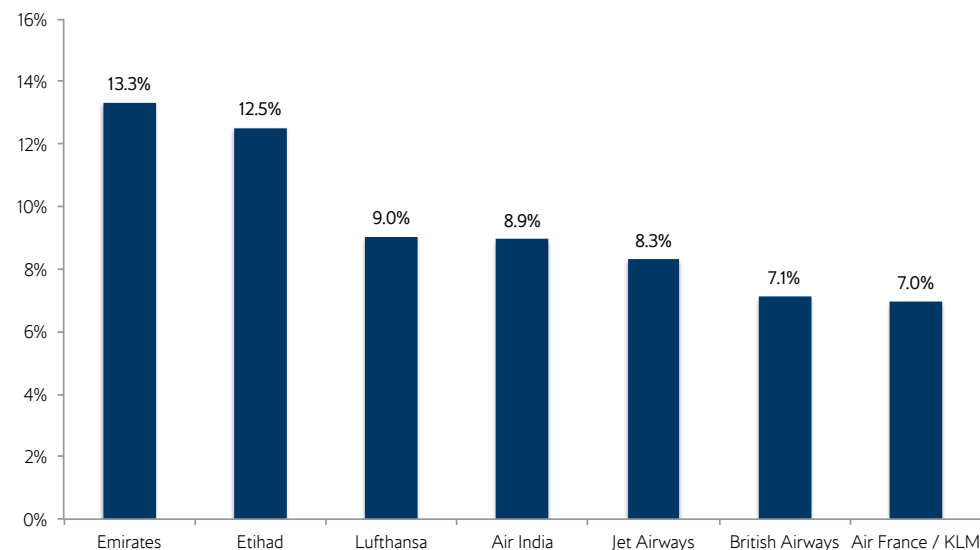
Surprisingly, we found the greatest revenue opportunity was not European, Middle Eastern or African destinations, but the double long haul routes to India. The market was worth almost \$2 billion and BA had less than 5% market share.

But who were these travellers? By observing patterns in

the data we discovered a large segment of customers who travelled in groups to the same destinations, every year. These flyers - first and second-generation expat Indians living in the United States and Canada - were travelling "home" to visit friends and relatives.

Indian expats were BA's most valuable non-premium audience in North America. This was a huge revelation. The competition on these routes was fierce but fair - a level playing field from a service and product perspective - but BA had the lowest market share compared to other major carriers like Emirates and Lufthansa (with 13.3% and 9% respectively).

India Market Share: Q3 2012



Our Strategic Challenge

Given that BA was losing out to other major carriers on its routes to India, how could we make BA the favorite airline for Indian expats planning a trip home?

The journey to India is long, rarely less than twenty hours, with two long haul flights, 11+ time zones, layovers in random cities, and more often than not, your entire family in tow. In other words, it's a big deal. But what did a British airline know about North Americans from South Asia that would convince them to fly with us?



Meeting the Expats

We embarked on a journey with our in-house ethnographers to understand the inner workings of Indian expat culture, their lives before they left home, how they keep in touch, and what goes into planning a trip back.

The most insightful part? Hours spent discussing expat life in the Indian restaurants of Jackson Heights, Queens, accompanied by Masalas, Tandooris and a few pints of Kingfisher. Eavesdropping on Skype calls between expats and their families, sharing information from the mundane updates about the new bathroom tiling to minutiae on preparations for the next wedding extravaganza.

The Insight

**“Don’t claim to be one of us,
show you understand us.”**

Every airline was telling expats that they were a bit more “Indian” than the rest – a more culturally sensitive product, more Hindu meals, and of course, the sari wearing cabin crew. Lufthansa even built a virtual “Chai-Lounge” - a personality test with respondents categorized as types of tea.

But all the expats we listened to were very clear, BA will never be as “Indian” as carriers like Air India and not even as “Eastern” as Emirates or Etihad. BA was seen as cold, stuffy and elitist. The warmth, trust and understanding exuded by Eastern carriers could never be BA, or Lufthansa for that matter.

Time and again we heard people change the subject from planes to people and in-flight entertainment to events on the ground. The details were irrelevant. The flight was merely a means to an end, the A-to-B they were willing to tolerate to get home.

It was clear what we had to do: let the rest of our industry argue about whose Hindu meals are more authentic, and convince Indian expats that we understand that it’s never been about the flight, but about **making the effort to take the journey.**



The Idea

If Indian expats are not interested in the flight, let's not talk to them about the flight. If they are not interested in hearing from BA, let them hear from someone else.

In this deeply matriarchal community, Mum is the pillar of the family, concerned and judgmental in equal measure, ever interested in the details of your life across the Atlantic. Who better to deliver a message of nostalgia, memories and a deep, instinctive longing to return home?

Your mother.

Our idea was to find one such mum in Mumbai and ask her to cook her son's favorite meal to be delivered to him in New York City, courtesy of British Airways.

The format was long form film, five minutes and twenty seconds to be precise - five minutes longer than the client was comfortable with. "Nobody will watch a five minute ad", echoed in the halls of the client's offices. But we were out to capture hearts before we could speak to minds.

We captured an India not of bejeweled elephants or the Taj Mahal, but of young boys playing cricket in a back alley, lingering shots of Mumbai's fishermen in the chaotic market, scenes so intimate you can feel the warm, humid air draught from your screen. The story is narrated by Alka and Ratnesh, a mother and her son. No actors, no sets, and definitely no planes, pilots or passengers.

The result was something unstaged, surprising, touching and natural with a killer twist you'll have to watch to find out how the team pulled it off.



The Strategy

We knew we had the right message – we needed the right time and place to deliver it. Our research taught us Indian expat travel planning remains an analogue experience – with local travel agents managing group bookings for the entire community. With little money, we needed a strategy that would ensure our message was passed on organically, from expat to expat and mother to son.

The web film was our centerpiece that would pull on the heartstrings of every son and daughter. Once they'd shed a few tears, we could draw them into a discussion about home, mum, and eventually, the journey.

We partnered with the Times of India and the South Asian International Film Festival to add a cinematic credibility to our content. Included were recipes of the food featured in the film, interviews with other Indian Mums, and an Instagram contest to win a trip to visit home. As the icing on the cake we seeded discounts on flights for people that engaged with the campaign.

The data taught us that the end of summer was the biggest annual booking window for travel to India for Diwali and wedding season. We also isolated specific markets, such as Toronto and Chicago, where other carriers were beating us out.

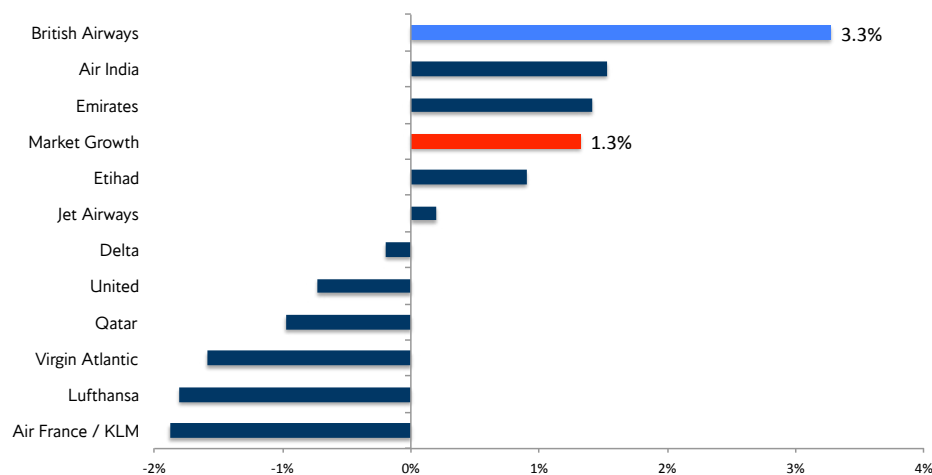


The Results

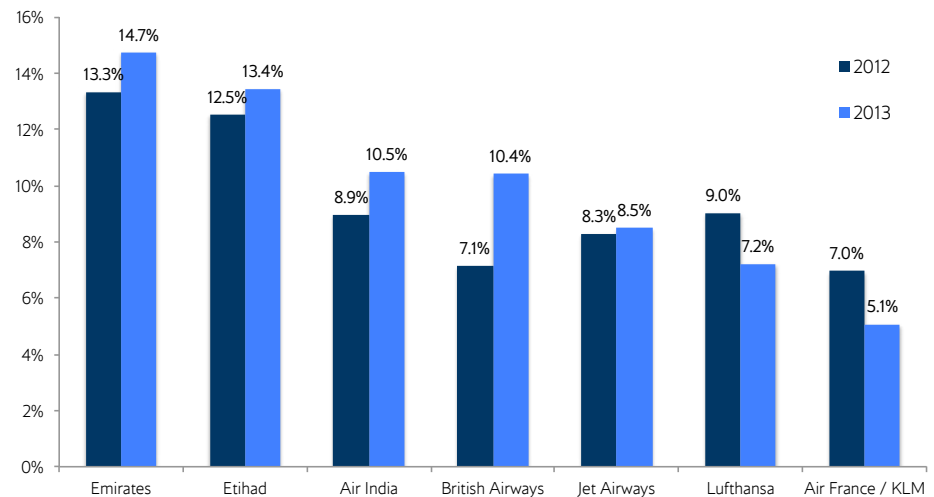
The Visit Mum platform has made over 1.2 million people all over the world cry. More importantly, direct sales on ba.com are up 65% vs. last year and indirect sales (travel agents) are up 75% vs. last year.

What about market share to India? Not only has Visit Mum stemmed the losses we were seeing in 2012, but BA has gained 3.3% market share (at the expense of Lufthansa and KLM/Air France) in just four months of launching the campaign, outperforming the market and the competition.

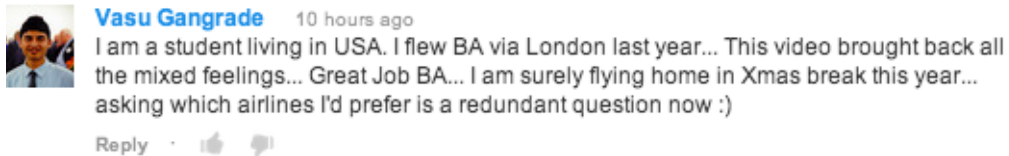
British Airways significantly outgrew the Market
(NA to India: 2012 vs. 2013)



India Market Share: Q3 2012 vs. Q3 2013



However, it's hearing the words from the expats themselves that proved we had struck gold with our insight and strategy:



Major news outlets took notice and enthusiastically posted the video, among their comments:



Major industry influencers praised the campaign:

"All marketing should aspire to be this good"

- Jeff Weiner, CEO LinkedIn

"If you #loveyourmum can't help but love #BritishAirways India"

- Jonathan Mildenhall, VP, Global Advertising Strategy and Content Excellence at The Coca-Cola Company

The praise from industry press has been astounding: Adweek's Top 10, Ads of the World, Creativity's Editor's Pick and awards are starting to follow, with two silver pencils at the One Show in Branded Entertainment and Interactive.