

Satisfaction in the skies

Full-service airlines have earned a higher score while budget carriers saw their score slip, reports **NISHA RAMCHANDANI**

FULL service airlines earned a higher customer satisfaction score in the Q2 2012 Customer Satisfaction Index of Singapore (CSISG), while budget carriers saw their score slip.

Overall, the airline sub-sector – under the transport and logistics banner – saw its score rise 1.4 points to 74.6, while the budget airlines sub-sector score fell three points to 62.7, showing that price alone cannot be a factor in satisfying customers.

Singapore Airlines (SIA) scored 77.8, Qantas Airlines earned 72.9, while Emirates scored 76.5. SilkAir, however, lost 3.4 points to 68.9 and Cathay Pacific Airways registered 73.2.

Budget carriers, such as Tiger Airways, Jetstar Asia and AirAsia, scored 63.2, 62.2 and 61.9 respectively. It is the first year of measurement for the three low-cost carriers.

Meanwhile, Changi Airport's score fell 5.8 points to 72.8, though its score

was significantly higher compared with its sector score.

The CSISG is an annual benchmark of customer satisfaction, released by the Institute of Service Excellence at the Singapore Management University (ISES).

When it comes to satisfaction of locals, satisfaction with airlines climbed 1.9 points, while Changi Airport registered a drop of 4.9 points.

However, the story was slightly different for tourists. With the airlines sub-sector, the score with respect to tourist satisfaction slipped 2.1, while Changi Airport and budget carriers lost 4.6 points and 5.3 points respectively.

Overall, tourists are still significantly more satisfied with Singapore's transport and logistics sector than locals.

"Organisations should look to shape their customers' expectations – engage your customers into designing your service offerings. Customer perception is reality. What matters to customers may be different from what matters to the service provider," said ISES director Caroline Lim.

SIA said that it constant-



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those satisfied customers. Firms that handle customer complaints well would successfully turn these customers into loyal customers," said Ms Lim. "Dissatisfied customers eat into the bottom line as customer issues interrupt daily operations regularly. This may in turn affect staff morale and increase turnover, creating a vicious cycle that increases the cost of business."

"With a firm focus on punctuality and reliability, we will not rest on our laurels and will continue to strive towards achieving a higher level of customer service while maintaining our commitment to offer great value fares," said Tiger Airways' director of corporate communications and investor relations, Teo Lay Cheng.

Jetstar Asia has a customer service team, including a 24-hour contact centre to handle customer queries and complaints. "We encourage feedback from our customers who can either call, go online, on Facebook or send us a letter. We care about our customers and respond to all enquiries," said Barathan Pasupathi, chief executive of Jetstar Asia/Valuair.

ly introduces innovation in its products, while aiming to provide a strong network of connections and maintain high service standards.

"Training is one area that we have always fo-

cus heavily on, and we will continue to invest in our staff as this is a key differentiating factor. Other airlines may be able to replicate the hardware, but it's not easy to replicate the consistently high level of service that we strive to provide," said SIA spokesman Nicholas Ionides.

After upgrading its Boeing 777-200 and B777-300 aircraft used on medium-haul routes with new cabin products, SIA plans to do the same for its long-range B777-200ER planes. It

strives to maintain and operate a young, modern fleet, and currently has over 60 aircraft on firm order from airplane makers Airbus and Boeing.

In addition, it is investing over \$20 million in its SilverKris lounges over the next five years to improve its customers' travel experience.

"As a customer-focused airline, SilkAir believes in listening to our customers. We receive regular feedback – through mail, feedback forms and informal

channels, including social media – and take it very seriously, at the highest levels of the company. To ensure our airline is up to par, we monitor our service standards through regular audits, service performance and customer satisfaction surveys," said a SilkAir spokesperson, adding that the airline recognises that there are still some areas where it can improve. "SilkAir has already been exploring a number of customer-centric initiatives to better understand and pre-empt

the needs of our customers."

In the case of budget carriers, where the score slipped a statistically significant three points, it seems that customers did not complain even if they were dissatisfied because they were disengaged.

"If loyal customers are assets, dissatisfied customers who did not complain are a firm's liabilities. Our findings also showed that if a firm handled customer complaints well, customer loyalty was as good as