



User Experience Strategy Gamma Airlines

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Executive Summary

Recommendations

A comprehensive user experience strategy will enable Gamma Airlines to achieve its vision of being recognized as the most loved, flown and profitable regional airline in North America. A user experience strategy will support Gamma in:

- Pursuing core business activities
- Investigating new market opportunities
- Investing in research and development for 'horizon 3' high risk opportunities that have potential as future growth areas

Business Context

The airline industry is changing

History shows that companies who fail to innovate are at risk of being disrupted. Examples include Blockbuster, Polaroid, Kodak, Toys R Us, Tower Records, General Motors. Pan Am, founded in 1927 was ironically known as an innovator, the first to offer a computerized reservation system and jumbo jets. Along with mismanagement, politics and regulatory policy issues, the company over-invested in its existing business model, failing to pay attention to innovation and research and development.¹

Business constraints

External variables including volatility of oil prices and regulatory environment, and competition from regional players and larger carriers alike, exert pressure to maintain low operating margins.

Emerging technology

Airline trends for 2019 include: biometrics, artificial intelligence (chatbots, airline maintenance, personalization), robotic process automation (security risk detection, luggage / baggage, terminal flow management), blockchain enabled technologies (more efficient transaction management between systems), augmented virtual reality (immersive entertainment, remote-controlled centers), Internet of Things (location services: wayfinding, upsell opportunities, baggage management; and personalized entertainment).ⁱⁱ

Differentiation through User Experience

Opportunity

Gamma Airlines is perfectly positioned to differentiate itself and address threats both from other regional and national carriers, and disruptive technologies and new entrants, by implementing a comprehensive user experience strategy.

¹ Frances Goh. "10 Companies that Failed to Innovate, Resulting in Business Failure." *Collective Campus*.

ⁱⁱ "Top Trends for the Global Airline Industry." *WNS DecisionPoint*.

While Gamma is structured following a mechanistic organizational modelⁱⁱⁱ, the company's size enables it to incorporate changes to current structure without disrupting its core business.

A user experience strategy that encompasses the following components, will set Gamma apart from its competitors, and enable it to:

- maintain its core business
- respond nimbly to market forces and technological innovation
- identify new market and partnership opportunities
- investigate opportunities for new, high-growth offerings

Essential Components

- Alignment with Gamma's Business Strategy
- Organizational shift from mechanistic to organic (for customer research / design activities)
- Collaborative approach (ongoing engagement with key stakeholders)
- Customer-centric methodologies

Next Steps

Agree recommendations and establish a user experience strategy for Gamma Airlines.

Agree Long-term Goals, 2019 Objectives and Action Plans.

Fund supporting activities and resource allocation.

Organizational

- Adopt an organic structure for customer research, design and development activities
- Nominate user experience champion from amongst leadership (rotating role)

Priorities / focus

- Identify key segments and customer types based on business strategy

Move towards a customer-centric company in all aspects

- Step 1: collaboratively defining customer journey for key personas
- Step 2: testing findings (pain points / opportunities)
 - Process
 - Technology
 - Partnerships
- Step 3: address agreed and prioritized pain points
- Step 4: evaluate success based on agreed metrics
- Rinse and repeat

iii Gamze Saba, Nisan Karyenic and Deniz Baran. "Organizational Structure, Organizational Culture." SlideShare.

User Experience Strategy

Why Do We Need It?

Differentiation

A great customer experience will differentiate Gamma from its competitors and enable it to successfully execute its mission and achieve its vision.

Multiple Digital Touch Points

Gamma's customers interact with Gamma via multiple modes and channels. For digital touchpoints, these include research / planning; shopping / booking; post-booking (check in, baggage, airport); post-travel (customer service, rewards).

Industry Constraints

The airline industry is competitive with small margins for error and many external variables that affect profitability. In order to maintain a competitive edge, Gamma's vision is grounded in repeat business both for individual travelers and corporate accounts.

Foundation for Success

A well-thought out user experience strategy provides a game plan that lays the foundation for a great customer experience, aligned with Gamma's business objectives. It is scalable and flexible; able to adapt and evolve as Gamma continues to grow, by remaining connected to the company's vision.

It ensures efforts are aligned with Gamma's business strategy. Before examining the customer's experience (either for internal or external-facing products and services), a user experience strategy will help Gamma identify and prioritize customer segments and sub-segments where energy and focus is best spent so that the following questions are addressed first.

- Where do these customers / employees fit within Gamma's overall business strategy?
- Is a better experience for these users critical in achieving Gamma's vision, mission, goals and objectives?

A User experience strategy will help Gamma evolve from an 'inside out' approach to one that focuses on direct research and design methods centered on prioritized customers.

What Is It?

User Experience Strategy Components

The starting point for a successful user experience strategy is the company's business strategy. The user experience strategy should likewise have a vision; mission; core values; strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats (SWOT) analysis; long-term goals; yearly objectives; and action plans for achieving objectives and goals. Jaime Levy defines a user experience strategy as a "high-level plan to achieve one or more business goals under conditions of uncertainty."^{iv}

^{iv} Jaime Levy. UX Strategy: How to Devise Innovative Digital Products that People Want. (Sebastopol, CA: O'Reilly Media Inc., 2015).

User experience comprises “all aspects of the end-user's interaction with the company, its services, and its product.”^v

Therefore, a comprehensive user experience strategy should address:^{vi}

- end users of a company’s products and services (both internal and external) who are integral to its success
- all interactions with the company’s products and services for those identified end users

Generic User Experience Strategy

There are some generic attributes of all great user experience strategies as Norman and Nielsen state^{vii}:

- meet the customer’s needs with ease
- simplicity and elegance leading to joy (own or use)
- seamless merging of services across multiple disciplines

Gamma User Experience Strategy

Vision Statement

To provide a digital customer experience that differentiates Gamma from its competitors and that promotes loyalty and referrals.

Mission Statement

Dedicated to supporting Gamma customers and employees interacting with Gamma products and services, by providing them with a seamless user experience throughout their complete user journey, with measurable satisfaction and efficiency gains.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT)

High-level SWOT analysis:

Strengths: support of CEO in establishing a user experience capability and requesting this strategy. Size of Gamma is still small enough to adapt to a shift in culture.

Weaknesses: the airline’s organizational structure does not naturally support adoption of a user experience strategy. It is organized following a mechanistic rather than organic model.^{viii} While this structure enables efficiency, quality control and cost minimization, especially as Gamma continues to grow, it can inhibit innovation and collaboration required for a differentiating customer experience.

Opportunities: Gamma is ideally positioned with a total employee headcount of 1,029 and a fleet of 56 Embraer 175 aircraft, to make a strategic shift in its organizational culture, in order to pursue prioritizing its customers’ experience and therefore outmaneuver its competition.

Threats: external variables (eg fuel costs, low cost competition) which may put pressure on required user experience resources and execution of strategy. In addition, threats from a

v Don Norman and Jakob Nielsen, “The Definition of User Experience.” *Nielsen Norman Group*.

vi Ibid.

vii Ibid.

viii Gamze Saba, Nisan Karyenic and Deniz Baran. “Organizational Structure, Organizational Culture.” *SlideShare*.

changing marketplace as emerging platforms (voice, bots, social media) provide competing channels for direct sales (as well as opportunities for integration).

Long-term Goals

- User Experience strategy seen as integral to helping Gamma execute its business strategy
- Gamma leadership are champions of user experience strategy
- Gamma employees understand how user experience strategy fits in with their day-to-day interactions with end-users (external and internal)

2019 Objectives

- User experience strategy leads to:
 - One defined customer journey for identified end-user
 - Agreed opportunities and problems successfully addressed (process or technology)
 - Measurable improvement in agreed metrics
- One member from senior leadership team as champion of user experience strategy (rotating role)
- One employee from each department as champion of user experience strategy

Action Plans

- Conduct internal interviews with leadership to understand their approach / departmental strategic plans, priority customer segments (see Appendix for interview guide references)
- Undertake an inventory of existing people / software / solutions / touch points
- Ask key stakeholders to identify software that they view as critical in supporting their department's activities
- Develop and execute customer research proposal in collaboration with key stakeholders.
 - Key personas (per Jaime Levy approach)^{ix}
 - Primary user
 - Biggest problem / pain point hypothesis
 - Customer discovery / guerrilla research
 - Re-assess
- Customer journeys (workshop for 'as is' and 'desired' states)
 - Address identified opportunities for improvement / pain points
- Develop and report on metrics for success
- Develop two-way education plan in collaboration with leadership and departmental champions

ix Jaime Levy. UX Strategy: How to Devise Innovative Digital Products that People Want. (Sebastopol, CA: O'Reilly Media Inc., 2015).

Moving to a Customer-Centric Organizational Model

A differentiating user experience that will support Gamma's vision to be "recognized as the most loved, flown and profitable regional airline in North America", requires its key customers to experience frictionless interaction with ALL Gamma's products and services.

Gamma's current organizational model follows a mechanistic, rather than an organic structure^x. The mechanistic model, with defined departmental boundaries, clear chain of command, narrow 'spans of control', centralized operations, and specialized roles create 'siloes' that can challenge an innovative approach.

On the other hand, an organic organizational structure supports cross-functional and cross-hierarchical teams, greater information flow and its characteristic of low formalization is an attribute of innovative companies.

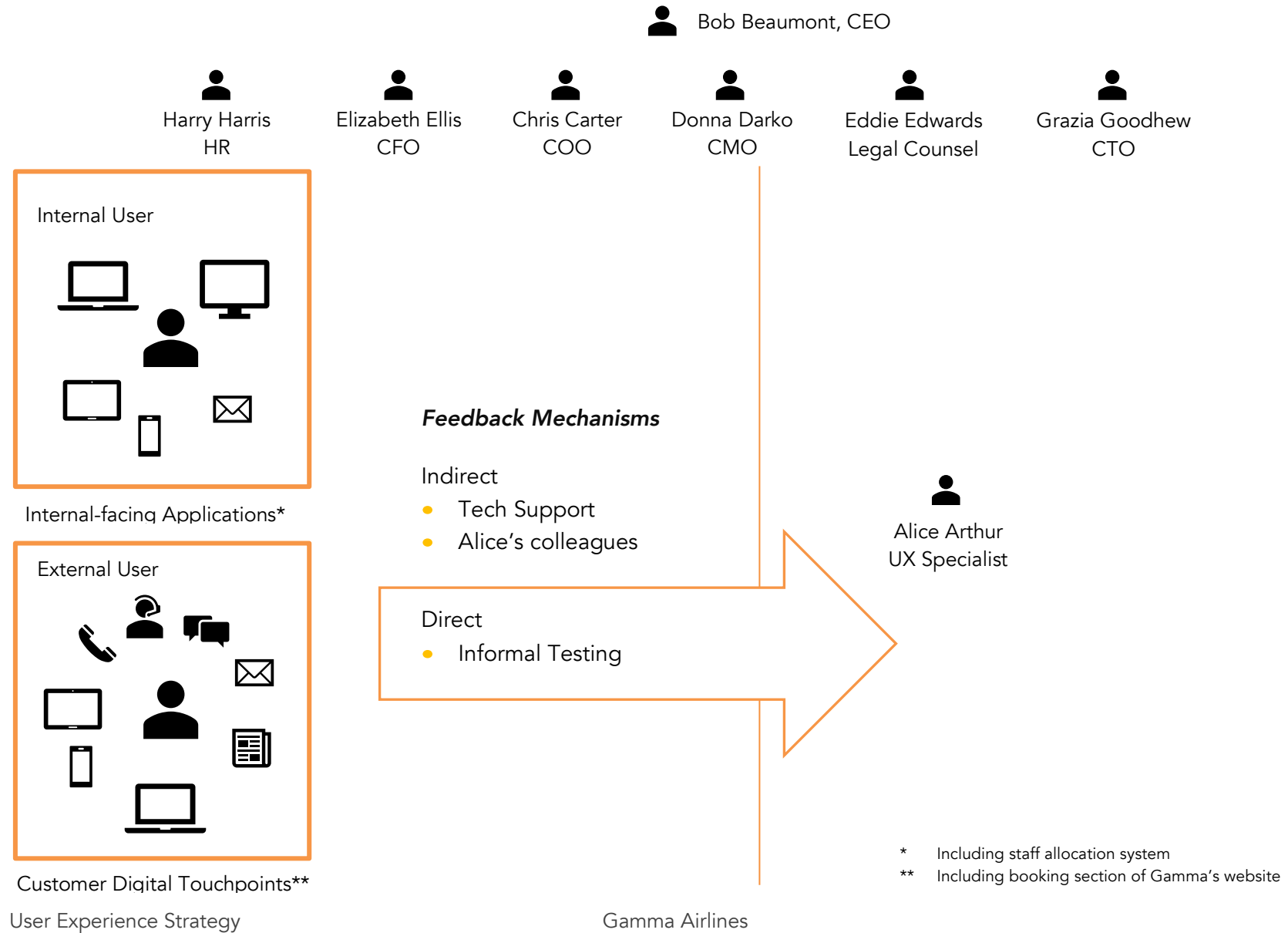
Gamma's business requires a mechanistic structure due to its nature, with safety, operational, scheduling and regulatory requirements central to the success of its core business. Yet, it is still nimble enough due to its size, to adopt an organic structure with respect to customer research, design and development activities.

In fact, this shift is an essential component of Gamma's user experience strategy. It will enable the company to focus on delivering the best customer experience for identified users, thus differentiating itself in a competitive landscape.

The following diagrams illustrate an 'as is' (mechanistic) and a 'to be' (organic) structure at a high-level, that places the customer at the center of the business, maintaining focus on business objectives and removing barriers to innovation.

^x Gamze Saba, Nisan Karyenic and Deniz Baran. "Organizational Structure, Organizational Culture." *SlideShare*.

Differentiating through User Experience—'as is' State



Differentiating through User Experience—'to be' State

Organizational Culture

- Enable flexing between mechanistic and organic models of organizational culture by adopting:
 - cross-functional team approach to customer research
 - collaborative approach to establishing user experience strategy

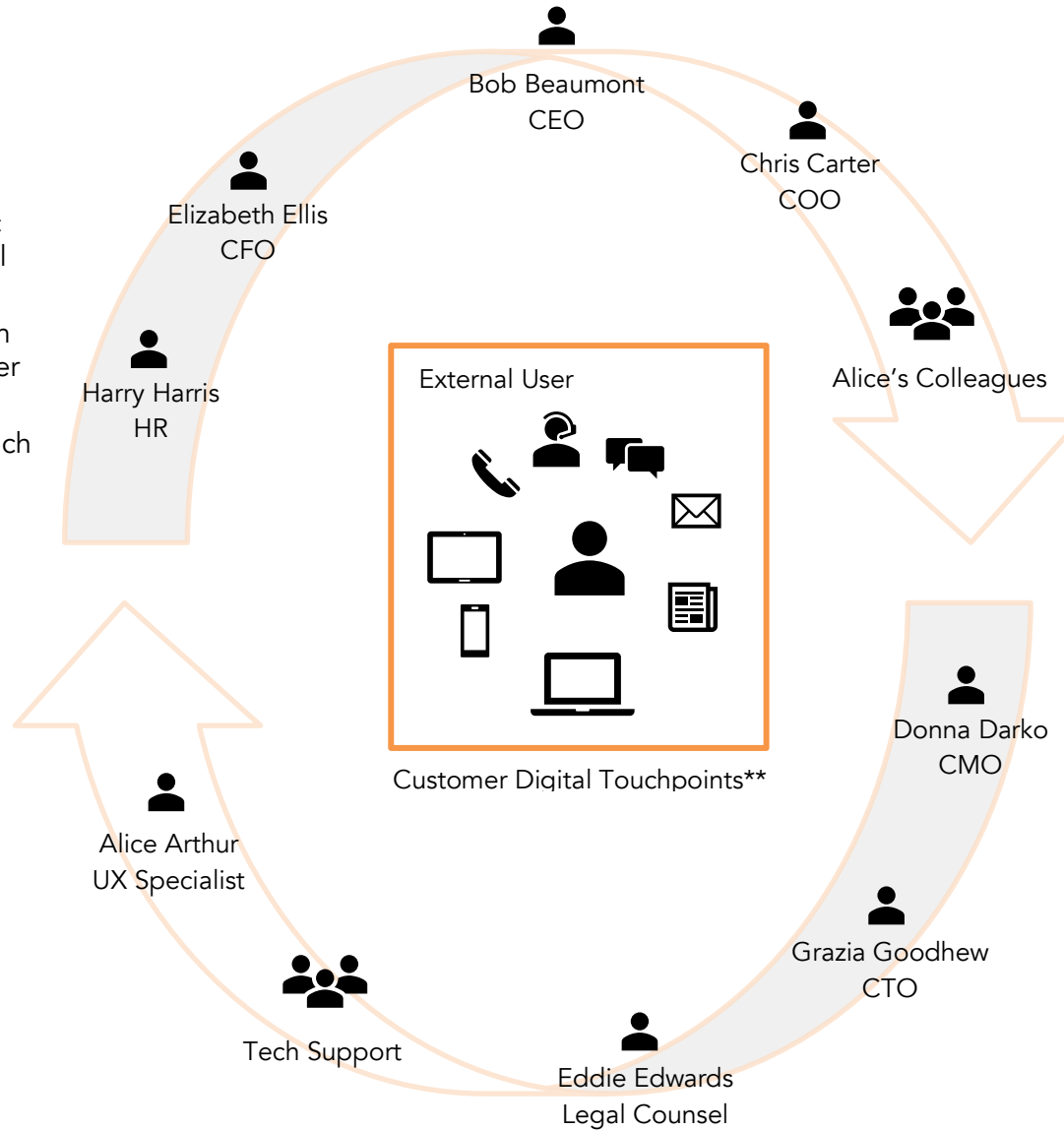
Feedback Mechanisms

Direct / Collaborative

- Customer Journey Mapping / Persona Development
- Rapid prototyping / evaluation
- Usability evaluation / testing
- Informal Testing

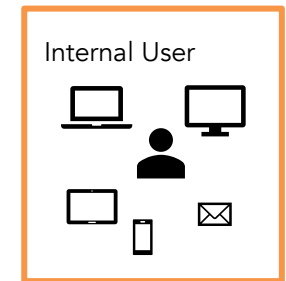
Indirect

- Tech Support
- Alice's colleagues



Prioritizing Work

- When UX strategy is aligned with Company vision, priorities can be more easily agreed
- Using this assessment, it may prove that improving staff allocation is a higher priority.



Internal-facing Applications*

* Including staff allocation system
 ** Including booking section of Gamma's website

User Research Deliverables

Key deliverables in Gamma's user experience strategy include persona development and customer journey mapping. Examples are included below.

Personas (Provisional Personas)^{xi}

Provisional personas are based on your primary customer segment and its pain points. They enable you to validate (or invalidate) your assumptions by 'quick and dirty' customer research and pivot if necessary, based on findings. They include:

- Name and photo / sketch: gender / demographic etc.
- Description: basic relevant information, location, level of education etc
- Behaviors: how the customer is trying to solve the proposed problem today, whether they're tech savvy, relevant personality traits, lifestyle, what they value
- Needs and goals: motivations, unmet needs

xi Ibid.

Provisional Persona

Claire, budget conscious traveler looking for unique travel experiences

Consumer
Leisure Travel



“ I love the idea of traveling to a destination that no-one has been to before ”

Description

- Gen Z, 18 years old
- Female
- Studying communications
- Lives on campus in Minnesota
- Saves to travel during semester breaks

Behaviors

Uses social media extensively, especially Instagram
Is conscious of privacy and who will be accessing / using her data
Relies on ratings and reviews from others, though driven predominantly by budget

Goals

Wants to be able to easily compare prices and make sure she's getting the best deal
Wishes that she could shop for a vacation like she shops for clothes (eg visual search)
Would love to be able to book a trip through her social media accounts
Looking for unique, one-off experiences
Dreams of combining her communications degree with her love for travel

Sub-segment – Gen Z
Gen Z is the generation covering those born between 1995 and 2015
They are currently between 4-24 years old (nearly 74 million in US)

Customer Journey Map

Customer journey maps are a way of discovering the customer's relationship with an organization, its products, services and brand. It is a way to keep the customer's perspective at the forefront when making decisions about business priorities.

xii

They include:

- Personas: end users identified as important in achieving company's business objectives
- Timeline: either a finite timeframe or expressed in phases (research travel, book travel, pre-travel, travel, post-travel)
- Emotion: how the user feels at each stage
- Touchpoints: actions and interactions (the 'what')
- Channels: the 'where' (digital and physical eg mobile, website, call-center, airport security, airport lounge)

The main goal of the customer journey map is the research process itself. This is a way to include all business stakeholders and form agreement on business priorities.

xii Megan Grocki. "How to Create a Customer Journey Map." UX Mastery.

Appendix

Gamma Airlines Vision and Mission

Vision statement

To be recognized as the most loved, flown and profitable regional airline in North America.

Mission statement

Dedicated to providing safe, reliable and on-time service in partnership with national carriers, delivered with warmth, friendliness, individual pride and company spirit.

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