

instinct™

Leading and inspiring all those who touch the organization
to understand, embrace and enhance the power of your brand.

First there was Jazz and Tango. Then, a little while later, came AC Jetz and Zip.

For those not following the business pages really closely this year, you can be forgiven for thinking that a few new boy bands have found fleeting fame in the teen magazines.

Sadly, those names have been attached by deluded "marketers" to subsidiaries of our once proud national airline, Air Canada. Faced with a low-cost, profitable competitor in WestJet Airline Ltd., the monopoly carrier has responded by launching a blizzard of mini-airlines in the vain hope that one of them can knock WestJet out of the air.



Tango, with its purple planes, is a low-fare brand. Jazz, is a regional arm. Zip, is a discount carrier. AC Jetz is a specialty charter operation. Confused? You'd better be. If not, there's a job waiting for you at Air Canada head office in Montreal.

A cynic might suggest that Air Canada is deliberately clouding the skies with spinoff airlines precisely to confuse consumers, rather than tackling the issues it has with fliers at the main red and white carrier. It's certainly more fun to announce new businesses with cool new names than to worry about customer satisfaction, lost luggage and union relations.

Air Canada's launch of Jazz, Tango and Zip (it proudly said the Zip name has been sitting on the drawing board for more than a year) is a classic case of company executives not understanding what a brand is and can be.

The brand is not just the name painted on the tail of an airplane, it's every point of contact the company has with the outside world: the people, the tone and manner, their vocabulary, the management. How is Air Canada different (better than the other airlines people can choose to fly on)? Being the only choice flying from Toronto to Winnipeg just doesn't cut it anymore.

Air Canada is diluting the company brand with mind-spinning new airlines just when it should be fixing its own tattered brand. WestJet owes its success to its consistent image and culture. When you fly WestJet you get decent service and the lowest fare, period.

It's a proposition which fliers and employees immediately understand and which has been infused into the culture of the Calgary company. Investors get it too. That's why WestJet's market capitalization is three times bigger than money-losing Air Canada's, despite its smaller size.

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Robert Milton and the rest of Air Canada's management team should stop asking their kids for cool airline names and instead should begin addressing the problems with their brand. Air Canada should mean more than monopoly. How about great service, efficiency or "on time, all the time"?

On second thought, Jazz, Tango, Zip and even AC Jetz are perfect additions to the Air Canada fleet. Like the mother carrier, they are brands that stand for little.

What would brand coach suggest?

The key competitor in this new discount category is West Jet and their Sr. VP Don Bell has established and maintained their unique culture as their key differentiator. Brilliant. This culture is best summarized as caring, positive and cheerful. A tough platform for the crusty old, union-gripped, Air Canada to compete on.

This calls for a separate 'skunk works' investment lead by an inspirational leader who first (to attempt to keep peace) puts out the call for the few, like-minded Air Canada employees to jump the grandmother ship and join the cause. He then goes to the market to recruit a healthy number of caring folks who have never worked for an air carrier-natural care givers; nurses, wait staff, entertainers and hospitality folks. Together they redefine service in their vision, take ownership of their jobs and a share of the company and take to the skies.

Call it Jazz, call it Zip it's how they live the brand that leads to success.