

May 14, 2010

## **Some frequent-flier programs are frequent decliners**

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*This article is based upon a report issued by IdeaWorks.*

United Airlines and Continental Airlines -- which will be blending their frequent-flyer programs if their merger deal is approved -- rank among the most generous U.S. airlines when it comes to awarding free tickets, a consultant says.

IdeaWorks Co., a Shorewood, Wis.-based consulting group, says in a recent study that Continental awarded free tickets in response to requests 71 percent of the time, and United 69 percent of the time.

That places the two airlines third and fourth respectively among domestic carriers most likely to award free seats to frequent-flyer program members, IdeaWorks says.

Those findings are based on 6,160 booking queries by IdeaWorks at the websites of 22 airline frequent-flier programs during February and March 2010.

By far the most generous domestic airline in the IdeaWorks report is Southwest Airlines, which granted free ticket requests 99 percent of the time. No. 2 is Alaska Airlines, at 75 percent.

United and Continental have said that if their merger is approved, they will combine elements of their two frequent-flyer programs. Until then, the programs function separately.

United -- a unit of UAL Corp. (NASDAQ: UAU) -- is the largest carrier at Denver International Airport. Continental (NYSE: CAL) is a small player at DIA, carrying about 2 percent of traffic. Southwest (NYSE: LUV) is DIA's No. 3 carrier.

When overseas carriers are added to the mix, Continental and United fall to 11th and 12th place respectively out of 22 airlines.

The 10 most generous airline frequent-flyer programs, domestic and foreign, and their rate of saying "yes" to free-ticket requests are:

- \* Southwest (99 percent).
- \* Air Berlin, Germany (99 percent).
- \* Air Canada (94 percent).
- \* Virgin Blue, Australia (90 percent).
- \* Lufthansa, Germany (86 percent).
- \* Singapore Airlines (77 percent).
- \* Iberia, Spain (76 percent).
- \* Alaska (75 percent).
- \* Jet Airways, India (73 percent).
- \* Qantas, Australia (73 percent).
- \* Continental (71 percent).
- \* United (69 percent).

Rated the least generous among 22 frequent-flyer programs is US Airways, at an 11 percent approval rate, followed by Delta Air Lines (13 percent) and Emirates of United Arab Emirates (36 percent).

The report does not rate Frontier Airlines, DIA's No. 2 carrier.