

The airline reimaged: Is this the future we've been asking for?

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Poppi says that changing the business model is as important as design innovation and the company has learned from the unique practices of professional sports and loyalty programmes. Secondary marketplaces allow Poppi fliers to interact and communicate on "everything from ticket re-sale to seat swapping via the Poppi app."

The goal is to make the airline a "lifestyle brand" rather than just a service, and the airline hopes to "develop branded artifacts that communicate membership." Design consultancy Teague has a long history of working with the aviation industry, including a 5 year collaboration with Boeing to mastermind the spacious Dreamliner interiors.



For Emirates Airlines the company created interiors with high ceilings that host LED lights that emulate the night sky as it appears in Dubai. The brand is behind the complete redesign that has transformed Air Canada cabins into minimal, earthy spaces with rare splashes of colour.

Teague worked with Nike to imagine an "athlete's plane" -- an aircraft that becomes a training and treatment facility for professional sports teams. The plane is designed to decrease the negative effects of teams traveling to away matches and allow them to prepare for what follows. The company, founded in 1926, has worked with a host of companies outside the aviation industry and is known for designs including the first Polaroid camera, the UPS truck, Texaco service stations, Pringles Chips canister, and the Xbox. Recently Teague developed Denny: a bicycle that it hopes will convince petrolheads to make the switch to cycling.

Poppi is the aviation industry's equivalent of Uber or AirBnB: the disruptive start-up that comes along to blow the dust off old business models and take longstanding business to task for their failings. Teague says it treated the brand like a soon-to-launch airline with a range of innovation that today's airlines could replicate. It's all about enhancing the passenger experience and increasing airline profitability, by making some surprising changes.

New ideas like a hotel delivery bag drop imagine smart ways a start up could make the airport experience less arduous for families and frequent fliers. Luggage could be dropped off near home -- perhaps at the train station where the journey begins -- and not be seen again until the destination hotel. Electronic RFID chips are attached to bags so that their movement through the system can be tracked at each point -- just as valuable components are tracked in high-end car factories -- so fliers can always know where their baggage is.



Boarding times could also be reduced. In the cabin, Poppi aim to do away with carry-on baggage bins and instead provide mini "fedora bins" that only hold personal items, such as computer bags and jackets. It estimates this could reduce boarding time by 70% and remove 1800kg from the cabin -- saving fuel and costs.

industry are big but he wants airlines to anticipate the kind of smart disruptive interventions that a start-up competitor *could* make.

"What we wanted to do with Poppi is envision those disruptions now so that airlines operating today can start implementing them," Liddell says. "The airline business model and how airlines operate both present a lot of opportunities for reinvention."

"A lot of these opportunities -- like how airlines handle baggage -- are obvious because the current model is broken or, at the very least, doesn't serve passengers very well. Other opportunities are less obvious and require some big thinking about what will happen a decade from now."

Basic improvements like minimizing the tiresome "gate lurking" wait before boarding the flight are achieved by apps feeding real-time information. Baggage is tracked safely by RFID tags, so that it can be dropped off as early as possible -- at train stations on the way to the terminal, perhaps -- and returned to hotels on the other side. Teague says Poppi's class system would focus on providing different experiences, rather than quality tiers. "Cinema class" -- where "exclusive" media takes centre stage -- is joined by a "click class" for frequent short haul fliers, where convenience is top priority, and specially designed smart baggage "clicks" into place. Then there's "promotional class" for the middle seat of the row, which invites brands to partner with the airline to offer special gifts and services for the "unlucky" flier.

For Teague, the challenge was to offer a better experience for customers without increasing costs, in an industry where carriers' profit margins are typically narrow. Interventions that reduce cabin weight -- by eliminating unnecessary carry-on luggage and storage -- and passenger time delays are among Poppi's suggestions. Liddell explains that "everything we did was focused on helping airlines improve the passenger experience while also improving their bottom lines."

It might only be an outline of "the airline of the future" but Liddell wants the airlines to listen, and Teague's longstanding influence on the look and feel of the aviation industry backs him up. The brand consultancy helped shape the current state of passenger experience through the five-year collaboration with Boeing for the launch of the 787 Dreamliner, and earlier classic interior cabins for the 707 and 747 planes.

The company takes pride in its record but, Liddell explains, "the biggest mistake any business can make is to believe in the illusion of constancy -- the idea that things won't change, because they always do."

Liddell explains what Poppi hopes to achieve, without the start-up ever having to start up.

We want to create a vision for a different way forward. One of the reasons we worked very hard to demonstrate Poppi as an actual, real-life airline was to show how that vision could be implemented. More than anything, we want airlines to look at Poppi and find inspiration for how they could change how they do things for the better, now and in the future.

We wanted to prototype innovations that airlines could make their own. The innovations we're showing with Poppi are meant to provoke important discussions inside airlines about how they operate, because our present is not necessarily our future. In my opinion, innovation is always about challenging the *status quo* and illuminating a better way forward. That's what we did with Poppi.

How would airplane travel be different if you redesigned the industry?

First, the airline industry would be a lot better at delivering services across the entire passenger journey, and especially all those in-between moments -- for example, the time spent at the gate, the links between the aircraft and where people are headed after, whether that's home or a hotel. We call this "designing for the seams." The point is not to create a seamless experience.

The point is to create better seams. The services airlines would offer within those seams need to be better, both now and in the future. And a lot of that will be accomplished through technology and partnerships. Second,

airlines would be a lot more differentiated. Airline brands are not brands that consumers really love even though airlines do things that are really amazing. So we need to design more love into the industry. That means fundamentally changing the industry's posture from taking to a posture of giving.

As an example, airlines make a lot of money on bag fees, but we need to design ways that make money by actually adding value to people's lifestyles versus just adding a fee for this and adding a fee for that. I fervently believe airlines could be even more profitable by making money in other ways that passengers would actually love. Third, we would make the industry more member-focused.

Adding membership models to the airline industry would be really transformative, both for airlines and passengers. Membership would create ways for passengers to participate in ways they aren't allowed to participate today.

For example, membership models could give passengers the ability to resell tickets, or swap seats more easily, and the platforms for doing those kinds of things would create different revenue streams for airlines. Most importantly, membership models would engage passengers in ways that go far beyond today's "loyalty" programs.

Is this something that's really going to happen?

Yes, but maybe not in the ways people might expect. The ideas at the heart of Poppi will ultimately be accomplished within airlines operating today and perhaps a few start-up airline brands, and they'll happen more gradually than if Poppi started flying tomorrow.

The innovations we're talking about will absolutely happen, but it will be up to individual airlines to sort out what those innovations mean to them specifically. We believe these ideas are better for airlines and better for passengers. Implementing them will take some time. But we wouldn't have brought them to life through Poppi if weren't absolutely convinced that these disruptive ideas will happen one way or another.