

Customer-Obsessed Airlines Deliver Nearly 6x The Shareholder Value Of Their Rivals, New Study Finds

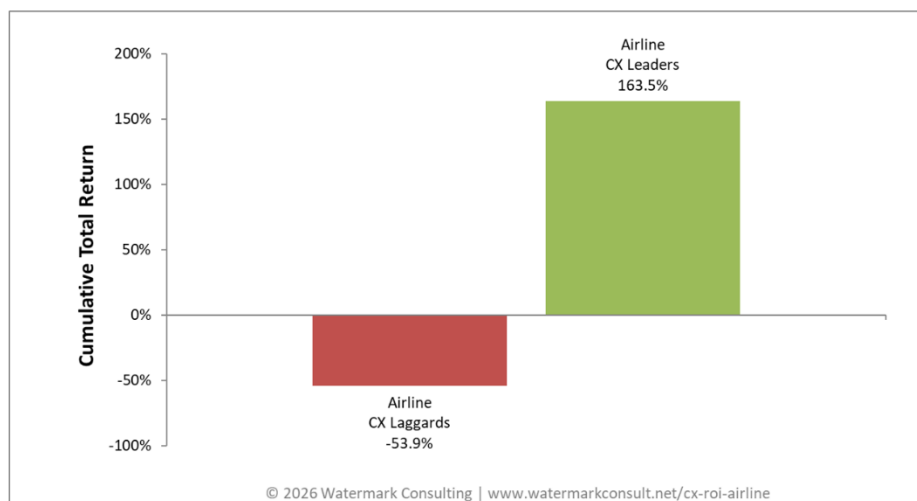
14-Year Analysis Shows Widening Performance Gap Between Customer Experience Leaders & Laggards

HARTFORD, Conn. [Apr. 14, 2026] – A newly updated study from [Watermark Consulting](#) delivers a clear verdict: airlines that invest in customer experience dramatically outperform those that don't. The findings come at a time when many airlines are increasingly relying on automation and cost-cutting measures that risk degrading the customer experience.

Watermark's 2026 Airline Customer Experience ROI Study finds that a dollar invested in the carriers with the strongest CX performance generated **5.7 times greater wealth** than a dollar invested in those with the poorest customer experience.

Airline Customer Experience Leaders Outperform

14-Year Stock Performance of Customer Experience (CX) Leaders vs. Laggards (2011-2024)



The study tracks the long-term stock performance of carriers at the top and bottom of J.D. Power's North America Airline Satisfaction rankings. It translates the often-abstract concept of "customer experience" into the universal language of shareholder value – terminology that every airline C-suite executive and board member can understand and appreciate.

"Many business leaders publicly champion customer experience while privately questioning its return on investment," said Jon Picoult, Founder & Principal of Watermark Consulting and author of [From Impressed To Obsessed: 12 Principles For Turning Customers And Employees Into Lifelong Fans](#). "This study strips away any doubt. Over the long run, the financial case for delivering a great airline passenger experience isn't just compelling – it's overwhelming."

Notably, the performance gap between the CX-leading and lagging airlines has **more than doubled** over the past five years, vividly illustrating how customer obsession accelerates growth over time by both lifting revenues and controlling expenses.

For businesses seeking to capitalize on customer experience to drive competitive advantage, there is encouraging news: “We have found there are a discrete set of techniques that beloved brands use to create great, memorable customer experiences,” explained Picoult. “And that [strategic framework](#) can be applied to great effect in companies large and small, across virtually every industry.”

With 14 years of data now included in the study, Picoult hopes that the analysis will encourage airline executives to rethink the economic calculus around customer experience differentiation. As he explained it: “Many airlines endlessly debate: ‘*What will it cost us to deliver a better customer experience?*’ But the more appropriate question really is ‘*What will it cost us if we don’t?*’”

Learn more about the study’s methodology and results by visiting Watermark’s [Airline CX ROI Study](#) website.

About Jon Picoult

Jon Picoult is the founder of Watermark Consulting and author of the *Wall Street Journal* featured book, “*From Impressed to Obsessed.*” A former Fortune 100 executive, Princeton-trained in Cognitive Science, Jon helps global brands use the psychology of “memory sculpting” to drive ROI and turn customers into lifelong fans.

About Watermark Consulting

Watermark Consulting is a customer experience advisory firm that helps companies impress their customers and inspire their employees. Watermark has worked with some of the world’s foremost brands, helping organizations capitalize on the power of loyalty in both the marketplace and the workplace. Learn more about Watermark’s consulting services, educational workshops or conference keynotes at www.watermarkconsult.net.

About the Customer Experience ROI Study

First published in 2010, and regularly updated since, Watermark’s landmark study on the ROI of customer experience was among the first cross-industry analyses showing a connection between customer experience quality and shareholder returns. The study (which now includes several industry-specific versions) has since become one of the most widely cited pieces of research in the industry, referenced by firms such as McKinsey, Deloitte, Accenture, Forrester, SAP, and Oracle.

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