

Will Concorde's brand ever fly so high again?

Concorde has rebuilt its fleet since the fatal crash of an Air France plane in July but, asks Joanna Witt, how can the brand convince potential passengers to step back on board?

From Madonna to Margaret Thatcher, everyone who's anyone has flown Concorde. Until the Air France crash that killed 113 people in July, it was the ultimate statement of status.

Now, following a six-month hiatus, the aircraft could soon be flying high again, thanks to a £17m investment from British Airways.

The first Concorde flight since July took off from Paris last Thursday for tests at Istres near Marseilles.

The airline is revamping its fleet of seven craft to comply with UK and French air safety authorities and is spending £14m more refitting its cabins.

It has already spent £40m just maintaining its grounded fleet and is fitting a Kevlar lining around the fuel tanks. The lightweight armoured material should prevent a repeat of the massive fuel leak that contributed to the crash.

Flights are due to resume in the spring, although BA plans to scale down its twice-daily schedule to one flight a day initially.

But will this investment be enough to tempt people back on board? BA is offering a little encouragement by inviting 1500 former frequent fliers to inspect the modified aircraft in its Heathrow hangar, and is targeting business executives who regularly fly between London and New York.

While BA does not release figures for Concorde, the flights are reported to bring in £20m profit a year.

We asked frequent Concorde flier Kevin Roberts, the global chief executive of Saatchi & Saatchi based in New York, what would make him return to the brand. We also asked David Rowson, managing director of Luxon Carrà, what Concorde needs to do to get its message across. His agency has worked on Aer Lingus' and US Airways' brand identities and undertook a brand management programme for Lufthansa.



Concorde: has spent heavily to refit its planes and ensure they are safer prior to a relaunch in the spring

VITAL SIGNS

Cost of ticket (London to New York)	£6000
Time (London to New York)	3.5 hours
Seats (London to New York)	100
Cost of manufacturing first Concorde	£950m
Total number of Concorde flights	circa 50,000
Total number of Concorde passengers	circa 2.5 million
Number of Concorde in service (pre-crash)	Seven British, six French

DIAGNOSIS



Kevin Roberts

All over the world brands are being gnawed to death by managers, consultants and retailers every hour of the day.

Few brands would survive the disaster that Concorde faced. Those that survived would do so because they had transformed their brand, as Concorde has, into a 'lovemark'. Lovemarks are relationship-based where brands are information-based. A lovemark has added love to respect and built the strongest emotional connection possible with its consumers.

Concorde is a truly unsurpassed product that delivers a benefit no other product can match – a 30-hour day. We forgive Concorde, just as we forgive our loved ones, because our relationship is based on trust, respect, give and take and, of course, desire.

The brand combines past, present and future. It is full of great stories and infused with mystery, and is a design icon crying out to be touched. It taps into all our dreams and it sounds great.

The problem for BA and Air France is both a PR issue and one of targeting. The overall need to rebuild confidence in Concorde's safety will demand total transparency.

The public needs to know what the causes of the crash were, what lessons have been learned and how the problem has been rectified. BA also needs to clarify the extent of the damage inflicted on its masterbrand and whether a relaunch of this flagship sub-brand is necessary to reaffirm its exemplary safety record.

Winning back customers will depend on what has happened since Concorde has been grounded. The select nature of its target passenger-base will help, but key to the debate will be the importance of speed across the Atlantic. If customers have not been adversely affected by travelling subsonic, the brand will need repositioning.

Concorde's key selling point remains its brand experience – flying faster, higher and without rival. It needs to remind people of these unique attributes.



David Rowson

TREATMENT

Roberts' romance

- Work with those irrational attributes that belong to all lovemarks – mystery, sensuality and intimacy. Think Harley, think Zippo, think Burton Snowboards, think your partner, think Concorde.
- Turn up the emotional heart, tell us you're back, tell us you're at your peak and in your prime and show us you still love us. Because we still love you.



Concorde: a truly unique brand

Rowson's rationale

- Quantify the impact of the Concorde disaster on perceptions of the BA masterbrand.
- Find out how important speed across the Atlantic has been to Concorde customers and how they have fared flying subsonic.
- Reconfirm the 'Concorde Brand Experience', a unique way and style of flying unequalled by others.