

a branded world

PODCAST

with
Luiza Campos



022 | FLYING HIGH. HOW WESTJET BUILT
AN ICONIC BRAND WITH RICHARD
BARTREM

EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

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A BRANDED WORLD PODCAST – 022 | FLYING HIGH. HOW WESTJET BUILT AN ICONIC BRAND WITH RICHARD BARTREM

- Luiza Campos: 00:00 You're listening to a branded world podcast, episode number 22.
- Announcer: 00:08 Welcome to a branded world podcast where we explore great brands and give you tips, tools, hacks, and guides to create brands that captivate clients and drive growth in revenue. And now your host, Luiza Campos.
- Luiza Campos: 00:28 Hello everyone and welcome to another episode of a branded world. A branded world is a member of the Alberta podcast network, powered by ATB and talking about atb, atb has a cool program called junior atb where elementary students run their own in school bank. It's super cool, so it's a great learning opportunity and offered the chance for students and families to meet ATB leaders. Check it out at ATB, the junior atb. Now in today's episode, you are in for a treat. I am talking with none other than Richard Bartrem from Westjet , talking about a remarkable brand. Westjet is an absolute great example of a remarkable brand one that achieved that status in a very short period of time. Return is the vice president of marketing and communications at Westjet and he has the responsibility of all external communications, public relations, social media, sponsorship, community investment and creative services.
- Luiza Campos: 01:35 Quite a mouthful. And Richard has been with Westjet since 2005, so he has seen a lot of the growth in the company and has certainly been a great part in the establishing of this iconic brand. Westjet

story is one of an underdog story, so here we have a small little airline and Westjet was founded in 1996 with three planes and it's very difficult to build a successful business in any industry, but he may be even more so in the airline industry. There are many airlines that have gone out of business and although there are many things to attribute to Westjet's success, brand and culture is certainly top on that list. Westjet brand really stand out, particularly for an airline, for being fun, friendly and caring, and Wetjetters, as they call themselves, the staff members, they just seem to be happy all the time. So what's Westjet's secret?

- Luiza Campos: 02:44 How did Westjet manage not only to grow tremendously in a very tough industry, but to win the hearts of both staff and customers? So much so that Westjet was named by interbrand, one of the most iconic brands last year, so today we're talking to return not only about how we're steps to establish their brand and culture, but how he continued and continues to reinforce and strengthen that brand and culture as he grows, which is not an easy task. Especially considering that now they have over 10,000 staff, 167 planes. They fly to a hundred and 21 different destinations. So how do you continue to strengthen your culture and your brand when you have so much staff in so many different destinations and countries? And how as a brand do you continue to reinforce the essence of your brand as at the same time as adapting and being relevant and compelling to so many different countries and cultures?
- Luiza Campos: 03:53 So I'm really excited to share with you this interview with Richard Bartrem from Westjet talking about their brand and it is a magnificent example of how to build a remarkable brand from the inside out. Make sure to go to a branded world podcast.com to see the show notes for this episode as I will include many links to videos and other materials that will reflect the Westjet brand and how they bring it to life. And again, you can find that at a branded world podcast. So without further ado, here's Richard Bartrem from one of Canada's most iconic brands. Westjet.
- Luiza Campos: 04:34 Hi Richard. How are you?
- Richard Bartrem: 04:37 Well, how are you, Luiza?
- Luiza Campos: 04:38 I am great. Thank you so much for joining us today at a branded world. I am very excited to talk to you about one of the most admirable brands I think we have in the strongest brand that we have in our community, which is of course the Westjet brand.
- Richard Bartrem: 04:54 Yeah, I mean it's a fun, fun story to tell. So I'm looking forward to the conversation.
- Luiza Campos: 04:59 Westjet of course was founded back in 1996 and he had just three planes and you know, it's difficult to build a successful business in any industry, but this may be even more so in the case of an airline industry. I mean, people hate airlines. So how do you build such a remarkable,

strong brand in this really tough industry and standing out as whatever remarkable brand that when hearts. How did you go about doing that?

Richard Bartrem: 05:32 I wasn't here for the launch in 1996, but I have been here now for 13 years, so certainly have some of the history under my belt and some of the earlier experiences that have interned been recounted to me. And it really is an interesting story. A lot of it has to do with some terrific timing in the market and a lot of it has to do with the hard work and effort and a big chunk also then falls to, um, being able to operate from a clean slate. The idea that, because this is new and starting from scratch, a lot of the paradigms that would have existed in the aviation world or in that travel sector didn't necessarily need to be to be followed. So you're exactly right. It was three airplanes, a 737 and the 737 is a narrow body single aisle aircraft made by Boeing.

Richard Bartrem: 06:25 It is the most successful commercial airliner in aviation history. I think somewhere around the world there is a, some version of 737 takes off every three or five seconds. So they are everywhere. But what we purchased in 1996 were three used 737. So as I like to joke, you know, we essentially went and bought the aviation or airline version of an '88 cutlass. So reliable, not the most fuel efficient thing you're ever going to see. Um, but it did the job and what it allowed us to do was go to market. We're in an environment where prices were high and we brought what is or what had been considered at the time, the low cost carrier model. And you'll, you'll hear me refer to LCC, so there's low cost carrier. Nobody had done a had done that in Canada. So if you look at what southwest airlines had done very successfully and continues to do successfully today in the United States, we brought that essentially to to Canada.

Richard Bartrem: 07:25 So fares at that time would've been, you know, the example we like to use is a one way or a return fare rather from Calgary. Vancouver would have been in the neighborhood of \$800 and our introductory pricing from Calgary to Vancouver, it would have been \$59. So this is a, this was a step change, a massive step change in airline pricing. And the idea was not so much that this was going to be an exercise in stealing share from the competition, but an exercise in getting people who were either sitting on the couch and not going or who were driving to give them a viable alternative to what was

available to them at that point and what was available to them at that point. His airfare was so expensive that we gave them the alternative of either having to get on the bus, drive the car or not go.

- Richard Bartrem: 08:12 And then the last piece in there was, um, being able to, because it was a clean slate, was from a customer service perspective, being able to say who says you can't have a low fare and a friendly experience. And it really is being able to leverage the wonderful Westchester's that we have been able to hire over the years to deliver something truly remarkable to the, to the guest. And so I think that is the recipe for what started west jets. I'm a success back in the, uh, in the mid nineties. And you're exactly right where, um, you know, if you look at the number of airlines that have gone out of business around the world, um, and these are smart men and women with good business plans. And you know, the more than 75 airlines have gone out of business in Canada, it numbers in the hundreds in the United States. And in Europe, it's almost a 1,000 airlines over the decades that airlines have been operating commercially. Um, these are airlines that have, have, have simply either merged or failed, had been bought out because it is a tough environment of remarkably tough environment to make money.
- Luiza Campos: 09:18 Yeah, it's staggering. The numbers and, and you're right, I think, you know, both in timing and the business model or approach that Westjet had really, you know, propelled you to the success you have. But I would argue as well that your brand would be top on that list too of what made Westjet so successful because I think you won the hearts and you provided a service that you still do to this day that is very different than what we normally don't in other airlines. Would you agree with that?
- Richard Bartrem: 09:50 Oh, absolutely. And that is very much that notion of the clean slate, where we were able to say, you know, for example, um, you, you would have already heard me, um, in our conversation today, reference a couple of times the word guest versus passenger and so deliberately by design because it was a clean slate and this does end up building out the Westjet brand or elements of the Westjetbrand where, um, we're going to approach customer service differently. So we are going to, um, refer to those people who traveled with us as guests. And I mean we're not crazy. We realize you paid several hundred dollars to fly from a to b as our guest.

But nonetheless, it really does set the tone for how we expect our people to engage with those people who are traveling with us as a valued and welcomed guests on board or aircraft or across our, across our system.

Richard Bartrem: 10:43

Then that is through our people. That is, that is in fact what has built out to, built out the Westjet brand is it's largely a commodity product. It's an aluminum cylinder that flies at 40,000 feet at about 500 miles an hour and will arrive in the same airport in let's say we're going to Toronto. It will arrive at the same Pearson airport that every other airline flying to Toronto Pearson is going to land that. So when you take something that is largely a commodity driven product and you're able to add something unique to that, and it's, and it's funny how the notion of, of good customer service isn't unique, but our ability and our take on it was, um, was fun. We took something that can be stressful in that travel experience and having the lineup for parking and security to check bags and we introduced, um, some, some fun and some humor and some empathy and some warmth and some care. And all those, those adjectives are part and parcel of what makes up the Westjet. Right?

Luiza Campos: 11:48

You certainly did. And, and you touched on some attributes of the brand that as a, a, as a guest, as you say, we can certainly feel it. You know, the fun and friendly and caring aspect of, of the airline. Can you walk us through, you know, how do you instill those values in a, in a staff that is knowing the thousands. It's over 10,000, right? I don't know exactly the numbers.

Richard Bartrem: 12:12

We would be just under 13,000 employees now. I think you're headed towards is know. So how, how do you hire and train in for that? And it's actually been one of the biggest challenges for us and continues to be a challenge for us today. And it is around the idea of, you know, the, the culture is such that it feels very much like a family environment and it's, we've been asking ourselves these questions for 22 years where we started with 200 employees and oh my goodness, we're now 400. We've doubled the employee base. How are we going to keep our culture intact? Um, and that has gone from, you know, we were three planes serving five cities. So to get everybody together and have a conversation around what it means to be westjet and what should our service delivery and support of the brand look like, you could do that if you know, fairly efficiently.

- Richard Bartrem: 13:08 Whereas now we are 167 planes today operating to 21 countries and more than a hundred destinations. That becomes more challenging, um, as an, as you now start hiring people into different, different markets. I think the reality for us is that westjet culture is going to change and morph depending on where you are and that has to be OK as long as it is in service of a that great guest experience. So how some of the ways we get at it is, um, there's a certain, a democratic approach to what we do. So for example, if you are a new employee, every Monday is when we have the orientation session for new employees and we put everybody together and it doesn't matter whether you are an executive senior executive within the organization or whether you are a front line maintenance, um, individual working for the technical operations team through to somebody who might be working in payroll or in the people department, what we call human resources.
- Richard Bartrem: 14:09 Everybody goes through that together. And it really is to, to instill this sense of, um, you know, every job in Westjet is going to contribute to a good guest experience or hopefully a remarkable guests experience for the traveling public and we all need to be in this together. And so we start that from day one to say, we do want you to be involved in these orientation classes together, shoulder to shoulder, so that you understand, um, what is the mission of the organization, what's the vision, what do we value? Um, and in fact, we hand out, um, on day one, I'm, as you might imagine as you go through an airport environment, there's identification that needs to be presented. So we all wear some sort of identification badges, lanyards, and we hand out the values of the organization that we actually do want you to wear with your id as a constant reminder of this is who we are, this is what we accept. Um, and this is what our mission in life is, is, uh, um, as it relates to the work that we do. And so I'm getting everybody to understand that going forward is a big chunk of that.
- Luiza Campos: 15:16 That's amazing. So what are the values of Westjet?
- Richard Bartrem: 15:20 It is funny and they have more morphed over the, over the years. And in fact we just, this just last week of February is our birthday because we launched February 29, 1996. But so what leap day? Um, so we are just now turned 22 and a lot of it's interesting. A lot of the ages that shit has gone through is a lot of the ages that have,

that is that a human would go through and there have been elements of that word where that is aligned. Where we were in our teen years, we were a little bit more fun, if you will, maybe a little bit more irreverent. And now as we are growing into young adult hood and as we are starting to introduce more complex products and services are more enriched products and services across the system. Our personality is maturing as an individual would re-insurers. So you may become a young adult and your personality is still largely the same.

Richard Bartrem: 16:17

The articulation of it though, can change as, as you mature, and so as the, as that is the case with a young adult, with a young brand that is now moving into, it's a twenties. So the mission has always been from day one that we will enrich the lives of everyone in Westjet's world. And so that is largely been through the idea of, um, uh, through to the guests that the enrichment in that context is a remarkable guests experience and a low fare. And we have, as we've gone into new markets, the, the, the business model and the pricing structure has been such that we have been able to go into markets, lower airfare, the traveling public or the competition I'm responds and the traveling public benefits from that because we now have lower fares in the market. And so we've seen that in a number of markets now where we've added capacity, we've added incremental seats flying out of a certain market.

Richard Bartrem: 17:11

Um, and fares have gone down. And yet it hasn't been us stealing share from the competition. We've actually grown the overall market because we're getting more people to travel because we can bring low prices and so that is certainly the enrichment of those people who are traveling with us at the same time. It is. I'm getting employees and giving them a meaningful career opportunity regardless of what you're doing in the organization. And so we do want to enrich your life as it relates to working for Westjet. And one of the ways that we've done that is through our employee share purchase plan. So I'm, uh, instead having, for example, a pension plan in the example of Westjet, um, we have a program where you can purchase up to 20 percent of your salary and westjet stock, um, and then westjet matches that a hundred percent, so ignoring capital gains, etc.

Richard Bartrem: 18:04

You know, you have the opportunity to purchase or to receive up to 40 percent of your salary in westjet shares

and that now then starts to drive a different behavior into the employee where you are, uh, you can be a significant shareholder within the organization. And we want You to act like an owner, which is part of where our brand campaign around owners care came from, is rooted in the fact that more than eighty, eighty three, eighty five percent right now, I believe of our share of our owners, of our westerners are our shareholders in the company and so they are going to make the decisions that are good for the guests, but also good for the company. And so we do ask them to balance those decisions out like an owner. We want you to be the ceo of whatever it is that you do and to make a balanced decision that's right for the company while being, um, something that's going to be good for the guest as well.

Luiza Campos: 18:54

That's a very interesting aspect. So do you think that having staff having Westjetters think from, from that perspective, you know now is your own or you have to think both what is good for the company and also what is good for your customers, for the guests. Do you think that's what has helped me understand the role they play in building this brand?

Richard Bartrem: 19:17

Yeah. And it's, and I, I certainly do think it is in addition to, I'm part of that being an older, if you will, of the, uh, one of the owners of the, of the airline is that in a moment you are going to be asked to make a decision. You are empowered to make that decision. Some of them will be right. Hopefully most of them are, uh, occasionally they will be wrong. We can have a conversation of what that looks like when that happens. But it really does allow you in the moment to say, if I owned this airline, what would the right thing to be to do? So it may not be to give everything away because if I own this airline, I'm not going to be in business very long if I am not charging for those things that are advertised as, as part of the fee structure.

Richard Bartrem: 19:59

Um, but at the same time, you know, if somebody gets out of a cab and they've been splashed into their soaking wet and I'm, their briefcases ripped, um, you know, in that moment if you decide to say, you know, what led me, um, that this, this glass of wine or this beer is on me, ok, that's, you know, that's probably going to be the right decision because you can now share a moment with this guest who's having a bad day and uh, and you know, we encourage those people in those moments to make

decisions that are going to be in support of this idea of being a, a caring brand. And, and so I think it very much so this notion of being an owner, um, and looking for them to participate actively and what that looks like has been a big part of our success.

- Luiza Campos: 20:40 That's remarkable. and I think it can make a world of difference, as you were saying in the moment, knowing that you have the empowerment, make that decision. You know, sometimes it can be a little thing like, as you mentioned, buying a beer for a guest who obviously has had a rough day, but it can really turn a guest into a loyal guest for life. Writing to someone who would be willing to share very good remarks about the company.
- Richard Bartrem: 21:13 We want you to act like an owner or the updated or revised values that we have that we have addressed the distributed out to the company. And it really is around four simple sentences. We, we expect you to behave and act as if this were your own company. And so there is an element of pride within that. And another example of that is we ask all of our employees to clean the aircraft. So regardless of whether you are traveling on business or whether you were traveling on vacation, when the plane lands, we ask our employees to clean the aircraft. So that is, you know, picking up, um, the, some of the stuff that may have been left on the floor, some of the stuff that may have been left in the seat, back pocket fold the seat belt. Um, what that allows us to do is by the time the last guest is now off of the aircraft, we're ready to board and keep moving.
- Richard Bartrem: 22:05 So we save in excess of \$10,000,000 in cleaning costs annually, um, by doing this ourselves. And um, probably the bigger number is the fact that we can actually utilize a plane, uh, for a, a greater number of hours in a day because we can actually move a little bit quicker and more nimble. So that first piece is we want you to act like an owner. The second piece is to, to care from the heart. And that really is, this is regardless of what it is that you're doing, want you to care about that and genuinely too. So, um, and then the, the, you know, the fighter attitude and us, the next one is rise to the challenge. And so this is always has been and will continue to be a tremendously complex and challenging environment to operate in. And we want you to rise to that.

- Richard Bartrem: 22:48 There will be more competitors that come on board in the future and we will need to respond to that. There are going to be greater challenges that we're going to face it on behalf of our guests and we need to rise to that as well. And then finally, just as a team, uh, this idea of working together to win. So how do we collaborate? How do we make sure that, um, we have all of our processes and all the people, um, uh, you know, I wouldn't even use an aviation example, but a but a boat one, you know, are we all rowing in the same direction than it really does become, that has to happen together in order in order to make this work efficiently.
- Luiza Campos: 23:22 I love that concept and I heard this before and I actually wanted to ask that. You just mentioned it as all employees. Our staff are responsible for cleaning the plane and I love that because it really speaks to that democratic approach that you were talking about earlier, right? You all equal,
- Richard Bartrem: 23:42 but it really does from a, you know, the founder and chair and still chairman of the board on down when he's traveling and I'm flying tomorrow and the expectation of me when we arrived is, uh, is that I will clean the plane, um, as well as senior leaders in the organization. There's an expectation that we will also communicate to the guests. So every flight that I am on a, there's an expectation that I will make an announcement to the guests on board and we all do this to say, hello, my name is richard and this is my role in the organization and I just want to thank our guests for traveling with us. The fact that you do travel with us allows us to go and purchase 77 aircraft and allows us to fly into more markets and we can't do it without you. I'm grateful for that. And if you have any questions, here's where I'm sitting. And it really is interesting to see the number of people that will come forward and summer complaints, but a lot are going to be a, just some, some nice comments on, on. Keep up the good work.
- Luiza Campos: 24:35 I love that. I love that idea. So one thing that I wanted to ask you, and I fly westjet all the time, how do you get people the flight attendance, like you have to hire people who are willing to sing, tell jokes, rap, like how to find these people and how do you keep the spirit this energy up? You know, all the time.

- Richard Bartrem: 24:56 Yeah. It's an interesting balancing act to me. One, one of the ways we do that is we are quite fortunate that, uh, we still, uh, and have been for a long time and it's still the case where we do get more resumes than we have positions available. And uh, in fact, I spoke at one of our orientation sessions yesterday for about 50 or 60 of our new employees. And one of the ways that I like to express it to the new employees starting is, uh, from the perspective of, you know, we received tens of thousands of resumes a year for what it would amount to several hundred positions that might be available over the course of the year. And, and, uh, and I referenced that not from the perspective of, boy, are you lucky to be here, but boy are we lucky to look through tens of thousands of resumes to find you.
- Richard Bartrem: 25:44 And so we've, and, and it's a bit of a chain spin around to what you would might think would be. Yeah, you're, you got lucky and got in to. We got lucky that we actually get to be fairly choosy, um, and, and, uh, and get to pick those sort of people who we are looking for. Um, somebody who is in a moment, gonna want to put themselves out there to do it in their own unique fashion, um, and uh, and be comfortable with that. And so we've been quite good with that. Part of the challenge is now, as we grow and start to travel further a field, how do we start to, it sounds almost paradoxical, but as much as I want you to be you in your role, how do we start to standardize some of that service delivery? Um, so that it's, um, it's a more consistent brand feel, um, as we, as we get bigger and start flying to more and more places.
- Luiza Campos: 26:37 Exactly. And that was one of the questions that I have for you because obviously as you mentioned, and as you grow, this will become of a challenge as and as you go with different, different countries, different cultures, even more so, but how have you managed up to this day to make sure, because you have hundreds of different staff members who are in front of different guests with many different flights, different circumstances, different times. How would you manage to have some brand consistency when they are using their own uniqueness as individuals to, as I mentioned, tell jokes or sing songs or create that. Instill that energy or expressing that brand at westjet is. So do you train your staff? Do you give them some, some guidelines? How do you manage that?

- Richard Bartrem: 27:25 Yeah, there are some guidelines around more to the idea of what energy do you bring to the role? How do we communicate transparently? Something's going sideways. We may have to explain to people here's exactly what's going on. So there is the care element of those roles which is delaying a flight. We may be canceling a flight and let me tell you exactly what's going on. And um, so that's certainly part and parcel of it. And then there is an expectation to bring a certain energy and then there is a, an element of have some fun with it. Um, don't take it too far. And what we've had to also as we expand, start to train in is a little bit of know your audience. And so if this is friday afternoon to las vegas, there's a bit of license to maybe have a little bit more fun and tell some jokes.
- Richard Bartrem: 28:22 Versus this is monday morning 6:37 AM. I'm to from calgary to toronto. That might be a time to be a little bit more subdued and let people just close their eyes and sleep and it's not about now if performing, if you will. So it, it is helping them to understand how to strike that balance. And again, paradoxically it almost becomes that brand consistency becomes part of you bring who you are and how you do it, to, to the, to the table. And part of going back to what I was saying is this brand matures, you know, so maybe we're not singing the barney song anymore where we changed the words to be about westjet. Um, because we've, we may have grown beyond that and as we try and attract a business traveler, I'm a more, a traveler is looking for a more premium experience. Some of that may in fact have to have to change.
- Richard Bartrem: 29:17 And so we're working together with our, um, our operating crews, whether that's in the plane or in the airport. I'm on what that looks like, but I still. I was in montreal a few months ago and one of our customer service agents made me laugh because I heard her a begin boarding for a flight to quebec city and she said, we're going to board and I'm waiting for her to say have zone one, two or three, and she said we're going to by who has the biggest smile on their face and so the bigger the smile, the faster you're going to get on this plane. And it was fascinating to watch the energy in that boarding lounge change in an instant and she did it bilingual in french and in english and so people started to laugh at just almost the absurdity of it. And then some people who do want to get on first. We're now walking

- up and approaching the customer service agents with the biggest grin on their face and now laughing at the fact that they were granting that much, which is now making the customer service agent laugh, which is now making all the other people watching laugh as they now realize. I have to up my game. If I want to get on next,
- Richard Bartrem: 30:25 and so it's completely preposterous in terms of why are we doing this and there is no reason other than I thought it might be fun in the middle of a tuesday afternoon to inject a bit of a, of my humor or in the individual's case perfumer into what is otherwise a very mundane process of standing in line. And I'll call you when it's your turn to go sit in the seat. Um, so there's, uh, there's still some fun and some energy and some uniqueness that can be brought to that, that again know your audience and recognize where you are and when you're doing these things. And, um, and it's a bit like, it's a bit like candy, right? where in small quantities there. It's their lovely, um, if you were to eat an entire box. So if, if everybody now started to do that all the time, that would wear pretty thin, but at the fact that it was outside of what would otherwise be the norm, um, was, uh, was, was a pretty unique moment. and it was fun for me to be able to watch that.
- Luiza Campos: 31:23 I love that analogy a little bit like candy, that's an excellent analogy, but you know, this is such an amazing example. I love it because it's so simple and it was just a little thing that she was able to do that really embodied your brand values and really embodied this fun, friendly, caring and how you take your job seriously but not yourself. Seriously attitude. And you guys are masters at doing this. You really are. This is one example of it, but how do you, do you share these examples with, with the rest of the staff so they can, they can pull on these and start thinking of how they themselves can, can do something similar.
- Richard Bartrem: 32:07 Yeah, it's a, uh, it's interesting. The, uh, in some of it is, I'm hesitating because part of it is, it needs to be, um, true to you. So if you are, you know, and that individual was obviously quite comfortable having that conversation, um, with the, uh, with, with the people who were getting ready to board or at least that you know, to do her or boarding announcements that will weigh in for somebody else that might not be that comfortable. So what we really are trying to do is get

people to be comfortable with essentially you be you and at the same time bringing energy that would otherwise not be there in the rest of the aviation world. So there's just an energy and a brightness that we want you to bring forward. Um, and, and to try stuff out. So we do share it to a certain degree, but we don't.

- Richard Bartrem: 32:58 Um, we don't indoctrinated as much as you might otherwise think. Um, and so and so it does lead to some part of the brand is almost that there is an inconsistent approach to somebody's gonna do it one way. Somebody is going to do it the other way. I remember being on a flight and listening to some guests sitting across the aisle from me and the one guests was explaining to her travel mate saying, you're going to love this. They think it's so cool. You're all my. I can get ready. It's so cute. It's fun, and we didn't do it. And so it was like, oh, I had sent her friend up for it's going to be this fun experience and it was a lovely experience, but it wasn't what she was expecting. So it's still something that we worked through today to say, so when do we do it? When don't we do it, and how do we actually make that a termination?
- Luiza Campos: 33:45 So those of you who have the listeners who have not traveled, there are any of you after you really need to to experience this because regardless of if they're singing or not, there's a certain energy that you're right is very different from any other airline at least I think so.
- Richard Bartrem: 34:06 He did one where I made my announcement to turn on all of them all up and it really is quite funny because it's a sort of thing where people touch it accidentally and then thinking, oh my goodness, I accidentally hit the button, how do I turn it off? And now here we are encouraging them to push them all at the same time. And of course it makes an incredible racket. And then I get to say, well, now you know, they work. So if you really need anything, feel free to call the. Hopefully that dentistry would be more than happy to help you. Um, and then, you know, I'll say something like, well, I'm probably going to pay for that because they're going to have to now help them with services because, uh, I'm showing them how the buttons a, how the buttons work. But it's a, uh, it's, um, there's just some fun fund opportunities.
- Richard Bartrem: 34:51 Um, within that we've had in. You asked if your listeners have not necessarily traveled with westjet, but even

going onto youtube, you know, we've had environments or incidents where, um, somebody gets on board and says to the flight attendant, you know, I would like to propose to my boyfriend, girlfriend, partner in front of a hundred and 34 complete strangers. Um, do you mind if I do that on the intercom? And we've said, sure, knock yourself out. Here's how you do it. And so if you actually look on youtube, you will find a, I think a few people have actually managed to document that and put it up on youtube where they have proposed to somebody in front of everybody at 40,000 feet and had a little bit of fun with it. And so it is understanding where you need to be tight with rules around aviation safety obviously, and where you can afford to be loose with rules where you can allow people to have what would otherwise be a mundane experience, uh, become hopefully a little bit more magical.

- Luiza Campos: 35:47 One of the things that I think has really resulted in, and correct me if I'm wrong to your success, is you definitely have that focused on the client, right, on your guests experience, but you do that through your not a customer, sorry, your staff, like you understand that your staff is pivotal to that customer experience and you focus on them as well, right? You focus on making them happy on ensuring that they are having a good work experience because you believe that that will then translate into a good experience for the customer. Is that correct?
- Richard Bartrem: 36:28 Absolutely. Haven't been very much this notion of if you take care of the, uh, of the employee, the employee is going to take care of the guests and the guests was being taken care of them. That takes care of the business and We're taking care of the business, taking care of the people and around and around we go. Um, and it is very much so. We are very good at celebrating our people and finding different ways to communicate to them from, you know, for example, we fly to 35 plus cities down here in Canada and ordinarily in an organization decides the size spread out across the entire country. You wouldn't necessarily see as somebody from the senior leadership team in your city and yet we have built out a what we call an adopted days adopted based program where every city that we operate in and out of in Canada needs to be visited.
- Richard Bartrem: 37:16 I'm up to four times a year by somebody in senior leadership. So if you think of whether it's grand prairie or

frederick tinder, deer lake, there's an expectation that I'm the person who was responsible for that base is going to get out there and their sole purpose is not to do it as part of meetings or a vacation they might be having. But just to go and meet with the employees at that operating base and talk them through things that might be going on in the organization and answer any questions they might have and build a relationship. So that in the event that they want to reach out to somebody at head office and somebody in a senior level at head office, there's an established relationship and somebody that they can actually, uh, uh, they can actually speak with. So I, uh, I am four times a year from montreal.

Richard Bartrem: 38:00

Well, I'm not. Well, I, I get one city, so I moved to montreal and the I've been, it's my hometown and it's the uh, so I get to, uh, to head out there and it's exciting for me to go back there. But it's also, it's exciting for me to go and speak with people who I've now developed a relationship with. So to think of somebody who heads up marketing might know on a first name basis, a lot of those people working out of that base and montreal would not be the norm, I would argue. And yet what we have set up allows us to, um, to celebrate those people. Uh, we do profit share parties twice a year where we celebrate the fact if we've been successful enough to be, to be profitable again for, uh, for another six months. And we take a portion of our profits and if we hit a certain percentage threshold, then we take a percentage of that profit and we divided up among the employees and we turned it into a party.

Richard Bartrem: 38:51

And so it's a, those parties happen in every base across Canada. And the idea being that yes, we could, um, provide that check to you as a direct deposit, but there's nothing fun about direct deposit. And so what we want to do is it will print a 11,000 plus checks and hand them out to each one of those individuals. And so, um, I would hand out, even though I would have more than 50 people on the team that I get to lead, I only handout for checks so that those people who then report into me can hand out the checks for those people that report into them. And those people can handle the checks of the people that report into them. So you end up with the camaraderie of getting together to celebrate another six months. Well done. Um, you get the thAnk you. You get to look somebody in the eye with that hand shake and then you get the physicality of the check to represent

your efforts are part and parcel of this profit that we're, that we're now sharing. So it's about celebrating the people to then to your point, to then be able to go out and deliver a great guest experience

- Luiza Campos: 39:53 that's yet another example of how you turn your values into experiences. So I love that. That example. I mean, there's so many things that I can think of that you guys have done that I think are brilliant brand successes like the christmas miracles that you do. Can you talk to us a little bit of what you think, in your opinion, have been some of the best brand successes that you've had?
- Richard Bartrem: 40:17 Yeah. And it's been um, um, it's been experimenting with some stuff, having again, the empowerment to say we're going to go and try stuff and it's everything from, you know, we still continue to this day to do some sort of april fools events. Obviously every april fools and we hope that we can trick people and it's just a game to have a little bit of fun, but it's a unique position for brands like weston to be in where we have our, um, canadians, not necessarily our customers, but canadians waiting to see. So what is western going to do for april fool's? And um, so we've been doing those for number of years. We did them as press releases even predating youtube. And then, uh, um, and then when youtube came along it allowed us to say we don't need to wait to see if the media is going to print our press release.
- Richard Bartrem: 41:10 We can actually do this ourselves and distributed on youtube. And so we've had some successes there. We've had some successes in social media and then back in 2012 we wanted to, everybody seemed to be doing these flash mobs all over the world and we wanted to do a flash mob. So we did one up at the airport and it was great fun. And then the next year is When the team had this idea to say is an idea that came internally. Um, the idea was could we have guests speak with sante via a video conference in a giant gift box. And unbeknownst to them we're taking notes off camera to find out what it is that they're hoping to get for christmas and could we go shopping for whatever it is that they were looking for while they were in the air, get back from the mall, wrap it and get it to the airport by the time they land.
- Richard Bartrem: 41:57 And we, again, much like the westjet success story, we were really lucky with our timing because people weren't really doing that sort of experiential marketing to the

degree that it's being done today. It was, we were good and lucky. We were probably great and lucky and the team was truly great in the execution of what they did. And we were lucky with timing where all of a sudden we took what had been prior to the christmas miracle, our biggest video at that time had been our april fools for cargo kids that had 750,000 views, which at the time was considerable. And uh, we had hoped to then maybe we knew it was really good content lead hook to crack maybe 2,000,000 views. And where we ended up was, I think we're around 45, 46,000,000 views that video has been seen in every country in the world, at least ones and all the intercourse that you can track all these analytics all the way down to.

Richard Bartrem: 42:57

We knew that within the first several months it had been viewed six times in vatican city as an example. So it was really fun to see the global distribution and the power of that network to take what was a really simple and caring message and perfectly in line with the brand and have that go global. Uh, it also set up an interesting hurdle for us of, oh my goodness, what are we going to do next year? And what we decided was it wasn't going to be about the views and I'm glad we decided that because both google who owns youtube and facebook and have changed the algorithms such that if you are accompany a getting a free ride is no longer feasible. So, uh, but what did, what we did say was what we want to do is just tell a really compelling story and let the chips fall.

Richard Bartrem: 43:47

And the subsequent year we recognized that we weren't going to be able to do the same thing again because it was so popular it would change from a simple conversation with santa to I want, I want, I want. And so we ended up going to the Dominican Republic where we already had a presence building homes for um, underprivileged communities there. And did the same thing for them because they would've never seen that. Uh, and then we had, um, the ability to do what we wanted to do with 12,000 mini miracles, enough vehicles to represent one of the, uh, every one of the employees in the organization. And we ended up in 24 hours being able to do more than 35,000, pay it forward and then, um, you know, last year or the year before, rather, um, being able to look at what took place in fort macmurray and realized that is exactly where we need to be. Um, given what the level of devastation in that market. And

uh, and so we ended up doing something there this year.

- Luiza Campos: 44:47 We don't know this, what are you referring to where the buyers that were devastating fires.
- Richard Bartrem: 44:52 Yeah, they use exactly. You have the entire evacuation to more than eighty 5,000 people is this city burned to the ground and we went back to that market and you can see that on youtube as well in our west jet, a channel on youtube and uh, and decided to throw a party for them so that they would, in a year of absolute horror and tragedy, um, celebrate the gift of family and being together. and it's. And it was truly a lovely moment. And it was, those were letters being true to the west brand. it's a, it's a, it's a touching story. And then this year we decided to do the 12 days of christmas and this was fun again, and it was, you know, we started to ask ourselves some questions of can we get dozens of dogs through security to bring gifts to people at the gate through to can we have the royal ballet do the nutcracker in arrivals? And so these are all the things that we set out to do 12 days in a row, 12 different markets and uh, we like to write a tall order and then see if we can, if we can hit it. And so the, that brand, going back to your point on it being about the people we can do those sorts of things, not because we're spending a fortune doing it, but because we have really clever people that we then give license to say go have some fun and tell the westjet story,
- Luiza Campos: 46:12 I'll include links to all of these videos. You have To watch some of these videos. If you haven't, they're truly remarkable. And april fool's day is coming up. So I'm really looking forward to seeing what you guys are going to do this year.
- Richard Bartrem: 46:23 Well, and it's funny because we've got a couple of ideas in the hopper where it's like, ok, do we really want to go that far?
- Richard Bartrem: 46:27 So we're, we'll, uh, we're working on that now. There is another video that people can watch. It's a little bit of an older view. I think that it talks about, I think it's titled stuff westjettters say, and it's pretty funny now what his Rasam and Casam,

- Richard Bartrem: 46:46 acronyms and I guess that's the case in any, um, um, in any industry where you have, um, a acronyms and so Rasam and Casam are the acronyms for revenue per available seat mile and your cost per available seat mile. And So we Do encourage our employees to think and act like owners. And so regardless of what you do in the organization, we would want you to have on some level and understanding of what are our costs and what our revenues. Um, and then the unit basis that we work from is how much does it cost us to fly one seat, one mile, and how much money are we making to fly? Much revenue's coming in to fly that one seat, one mile, so you take the hundred and 67 aircraft we have in the fleet multiplied by the number of seats on board. Um, those aircraft multiplied by the number of miles we anticipate to fly.
- Richard Bartrem: 47:37 So you end up with a roughly 35,000,000,000 seat miles. and then how much, um, how much does everything from labor to airport costs to rent a fuel to maintenance, to financing? how much does, although I must as well, those costs rolled up two divided by the number of seat miles. And then how much revenue are we bringing up divided by those? So it was just some fun, uh, where it's an interesting environment to be in where we do have an expectation that as an employee, regardless of what you do, we want you to understand what are the implications of, of costs that we may be bringing into the system. And what are the implications of, uh, of revenue opportunities that we see?
- Luiza Campos: 48:17 Well, that's really remarkable because I don't know, maybe other companies, if any at all actually, that their employees, regardless of where they are in your organization, think even think about that.
- Richard Bartrem: 48:30 I want you to be thinking of is that, you know, we had one, for example, where we had an employee who was looking at, there's a water gauge in the back of the aircraft. I'm in the back alley that shows how much water is on board and somebody asked, so why is it that if we are flying from calgary to edmonton that we have a full tank of water that's enough water for us to go from calgary to cancun? And, and the reality was, um, we don't have external gauges. So when somebody was filling the water onboard the aircraft down on the ramp, the only way they would know it was full was when the water started to pour out. So they would keep going until it was full and then just shut the door. So we were

burning fuel to carry water we were never going to use. And so we actually went back to boeing to work with them to see can we get external gauges so we're actually only putting in the water we need so we're not burning fuel to carry water. We're not going to use

- Luiza Campos: 49:25 like the example of having staff cleaning the aircraft once you arrived. It's, it's an amazing example of thinking about the company as well as the user or your gas, but also little things that staff can do and if they're thinking about it, but that the staff can do can, which can translate into a much more profitable business.
- Richard Bartrem: 49:49 Yeah. and it. And because it is a high volume business, you may think of something that is insignificant, um, but it, it can add up, you know. So for example, when oil prices were much higher than they are today, we did look at our inflight magazine and look at how big is it and what type of paper is it printed on it. So we actually adjusted the size to be smaller and then changed the substrate that it was printed on so that it was actually a lighter magazine because it sounds silly to say that a, um, um, a magazine moving from weighing this many grams to link this many grams doesn't add up, but when you multiply it by a hundred and seven planes and all the seats on board and all the flying we're going to do with all the associated fuel. Um, it can add up.
- Luiza Campos: 50:33 Yeah. And again, this is all these variables is I think what makes the business you're in the airline business. So task, so difficult to be successful at that you guys are amazing at it and your brand and your culture is remarkable. But you've mentioned before, you know how now the companies of course, drawing even more and going into different countries and cultures and having thousands of employees. So what is in store for the west jet brand? You know, you talked about how the brand needs to grow obviously, and is maturing as a company gets older. So what is in store for the westjet?
- Richard Bartrem: 51:17 we will within the next 12 months take delivery of our first boeing seven, eight, seven dreamliner, which just sounds like a bunch of numbers, but it is a wide body aircraft that is a technological marvel of state of the art aircraft that is, um, not only exactly that, but also capable of flying upwards of 14 hours. So the westjet world as we know it today is going to change in the next few years where we now will pretty well be able to reach anywhere

in the world from anywhere in Canada. So we have some pretty heavy decisions to make in terms of where do we see the brand operating in the future. Um, and that's going to be into countries and continents that we don't necessarily fly to today. That's certainly exciting. It does require at the same time I'm a greater level of consistency in terms of how we do bring that guest experience piece to the, to the table because the, that comes through and on a couple of friends.

Richard Bartrem: 52:17

One being we're going to go into countries and cultures where our brand of what we do may not be as readily understood, so we need to understand and make sure we know what works and doesn't work in a certain market and at the same time we have largely delivered on our mandate of going after that leisure traveler and we are now morphing into becoming a global airline where we're going to want to woo more business travelers who wouldn't necessarily be traveling with us today. So the, the, the order for us, it can be a tall order in some markets, is to get people to understand that we can be a relevant business airline for you. And for those travelers who are looking for a premium travel experience, we can be relevant to you as well. So these seven, eight sevens will have, which is new for westjet at business class on board the plane. Um, this will be lie flat beds with linda or with um, uh, with do surveys. And this is a new service delivery for westjet. So a part of the balance that we will have to strike is how do we stay true to who we are as west jet while we introduce a more sophisticated level of service and still keep that approachability that is, that is something we've become a become a known for.

Luiza Campos: 53:38

I will be watching because as I mentioned, you guys have been masters returned at building this remarkable brand that really truly is on a mission, not just saying that they are in a mission and you are amazing at turning your values into experiences in getting your staff to understand how they can do that and being true to your brand. So I really admire the west jet brand and I think any brand can really learn a lot from what you are doing.

Richard Bartrem: 54:06

Yeah. thank you. I, I, you know, I, if you look at what I do in my role at my level, I am privileged to have the gig that I do, um, because I get to work with some really terrifically smart men and women who bring an energy level to wanting to do what we do a little bit differently.

And that is that, that is tremendously energizing and it is a unique situation to be in for this brand and the, you know, there's the, there's not many brands in Canada where you get to have this much fun to get your fingerprints all over it and truly change something that is terrifically meaningful for, for, for Canadians, and that is air travel and to be a part of that and to work with teams that are, that committed to it as a blessing. So I'm, uh, I certainly consider myself fortunate that we've got such wonderful people working at Western. It's a, it's a ton of fun.

- Luiza Campos: 55:00 That's awesome. Anything else you'd like to add?
- Richard Bartrem: 55:03 Yeah, just, I, it's, um, it's, it's funny, it's, you know, one of the biggest challenges for us, and I think it is for any brand, is this notion of change management. And it's funny because it's, we're no different than any other company where, you know, we've got a fair bit of angst around change management and making sure we're doing that well. We've just had so much change. Um, that change has been a constant for us. And, uh, as part of what's made that, that fun for us leaning into that change has been part of that fun and that's a, uh, that's what keeps coming back every day is knowing that no two days are going to be the same. And how do we turn that into some, uh, some great opportunities for ourselves and for our, for our guests.
- Luiza Campos: 55:44 Well, and I think that's also one of the, one of the attributes of remarkable brands is that they are willing to be uncomfortable or really to evolve with times and accept change or have even been wanting or looking for change as long as it is evolving.
- Richard Bartrem: 56:03 Yeah, absolutely. You're absolutely right. And it's also an, it's a, it's an interesting one where it's a high profile industry where we are all very aware and, and of course in the social media world, it invariably will get captured and disseminated across social platforms when things go sideways. And so it's a highly visible, um, sometimes stressful environment where things don't always go well and everybody wants to tell their story about why it doesn't. And so that's where, you know, we've tried to get people to realize, do your best, do what you think is right for the company and for the guest, and we'll let those chips fall.

Luiza Campos:	56:40	Thank you so much for this. It's been talk to you and thank you for sharing the westjet brand story.
Richard Bartrem:	56:48	My pleasure. Thank you. I hope the, the, the, uh, your listeners and enjoy the story, a fun story to tell and I appreciate the time you've given me.
Luiza Campos:	56:56	I hope you enjoy this interview with Richard Barton from westjet. And don't forget to go to a branded world podcast.com to find the links in the show notes to all the videos that we mentioned in the podcast. If you are enjoying a branded world podcast, and I hope you are, please consider leaving a review in itunes. This helps other people find the podcast or you can also share the podcast link with some of your friends. If you are enjoying this podcast, I also recommend checking out additional podcasts that are part of the alberta podcast network. There are many different podcasts and new ones being added frequently. So you are sure to find one that you will like and the link is alberta podcast network.com. Thank you so much for listening. And until next time.
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