

Fix long phone waiting times for airlines – use a travel agent

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Airline customers are facing enormous phone waiting times – sometimes many hours – and two top international carriers are copping criticism over the issue in frequent flyer publications and on social media.

The problems appear to reflect Covid's impact on the airline industry, coupled with high demand. The hassles serve as a vivid reminder of why consumers could find it much more convenient to book with a travel agent or personal travel advisor. It's a good point for agents to stress!

Two renowned international airlines, competitors that each pride themselves on their service, have been mentioned over the phone delays recently – Qantas and Singapore Airlines. Not that the problem is necessarily confined to them.

In the case of Qantas, a [Change.org petition](#) has been started to “Demand better customer service from Qantas”. The petition claims the average wait time on hold to the Qantas 13 13 13 **number is over five hours.** A frequent flyer newsletter recently spoke of “being able to fly from Sydney to Perth in the time it takes for someone from Qantas to pick up the phone”.

Laura Jayne Howard posted on Facebook yesterday: “**Qantas almost 5 (!!)** hours on hold to be told **you have technical issues preventing me from completing my booking, seriously that's poor.**”

Also on Facebook, the Sydney-based travel writer, editor, blogger and communications consultant Mark Chipperfield posted on 11 March: “I am a loyal Qantas customer (for over 20 years) but it's so frustrating to **spend two hours waiting to speak to a consultant who is then unable to find the information you need!** Lift your game Qantas.”

Singapore Airlines is facing criticism over the same issue.

Facebook user Ong Roy addressed the following to Singapore Airlines on 23 March: “Hi! I have been waiting **for more than 3 hours over the phone to cancel my tickets.** Pretty ridiculous to wait that long for something so simple.” Mohamed Aslam wrote to Singapore Airlines via Facebook on 24 March: “**So my flight timing was changed without any reason** and now I am not able to contact customer care phone number in Vancouver even after 3 hours of waiting.”

Angela Arunarsirakul wrote on 2 March: “Yesterday, I waited for 2.5 hrs to confirm that my flight credit is still valid. Today, **I'm at 4.5+ hrs and still waiting to re-book a flight using my flight credit.** I don't understand why I cannot do this online.”

Written by Peter Needham

Qantas apologises for lengthy call wait times

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After much anguish about long phone waiting times, Qantas has issued an apology.

The issue has been much on travellers' minds. See: [Fix long phone waiting times for airlines – use a travel agent](#) **Here's the Qantas statement:**

The recent call wait times that our customers have been experiencing are not acceptable. We sincerely apologise to customers who have had to spend so long to speak to someone and we thank them for their patience.

No airline's contact centres were designed to be able to manage the record number of calls and complexity of queries for Covid-era travel, particularly when international travel is involved.

Our call volume has increased from an average of 7500 calls a day to 14,000 calls a day, with calls on average taking 50 per cent longer to resolve than pre-Covid given the complexity of some itineraries across more than one airline where routes are re-opening and flights are re-starting at different times.

Given the volume and the increased complexity of customer queries, it will take some time for call wait times to normalise, but we're working every day to improve the experience for our customers.

Edited by Peter Needham