



City of Santa Barbara
Airport Department

DATE: August 17, 2016
TO: Airport Commission
FROM: Hazel Johns, Airport Director
SUBJECT: May Terminal Intercept Survey Results

RECOMMENDATION:

That Airport Commission receive a presentation on the results of a passenger intercept survey conducted in the Airline Terminal on May 16-19, 2016.

DISCUSSION:

Background and Methodology

Staff members conducted a passenger intercept survey for four days, Monday-Thursday May 16-19, 2016, from 5 am - noon. A total of 472 passengers agreed to fill out the survey form. The purpose of conducting the survey was to gather certain passenger demographic data, test knowledge of Airport marketing programs as well as assess passenger satisfaction with their travel experience at SBA.

The results from the survey should be viewed with some degree of caution as there was no particular sampling plan which would be necessary to calculate a margin of error for the responses. Nonetheless, the data is useful as a general indicator of passenger knowledge and perceptions.

John Wayne Airport in Orange County conducted a similar, although more extensive survey in late 2015, which has been used in some cases as an approximate reference point for the SBA results. Like the JWA survey, the SBA survey was limited to intercepted travelers who already have chosen SBA as their departure point, and therefore, it cannot provide information about the population of residents who **DO NOT** choose SBA.

Our most recent catchment area analysis suggests that that there are roughly 50% of catchment area residents who could choose to depart from SBA, but do not. We lack insight into the decision-making rationale of those travelers. Such information could provide insight into what strategies would be necessary in order to influence a change in behavior and increase passenger demand at SBA.

Demographics

Not surprisingly, the survey showed that male and female travelers are nearly equally represented, with a slight nod to female travelers. Results also showed that the majority of travelers usually traveled for leisure purposes from SBA, which in turn typically will increase the number of female travelers slightly. The typical SBA traveler appears to be somewhat older than as was evident in the Orange County study. Nearly half of SBA travelers were over the age of 56, with another third in the age category of 36-55.

About 56% of passengers indicated that their residence was located within the primary catchment area of Santa Barbara with very few passengers originating from the flanking north and south catchment areas. Another 38% were resident outside of the catchment area entirely.

Marketing

Among those who responded to questions about advertising, more than a third could not recall seeing advertisements for SBA, and roughly another third were not sure or did not answer the question. Although among those who did recall seeing advertising, transit and Internet advertising were the most commonly noted.

In general, travelers are seeking information about travel and booking travel on the Internet. A majority do not know specifically about the SBA website, but find information on other travel related websites or perhaps even via social media. These results suggest that the most effective marketing channels may be those that intersect with the traveler's consciousness at or near the point of decision-making about a trip, which for most may be via the Internet.

Satisfaction

When asked to grade SBA on a traditional school report card "A" to "F" scale, nearly three-quarters gave the Airport an "A" grade. The John Wayne survey asked similar questions and by comparison received an average "B" grade. SBA travelers are choosing the Airport due to location and/or convenience and are very satisfied with their experience. There is a high rate of purchase from Airport concessions, and aside from perhaps more food options, most are satisfied with the selection of available offerings. These results suggest that SBA is living up to its promise of being the "Easy Come, Easy Go" airport.

If location and convenience are the strongest arguments to choose SBA over another airport, many potential SBA travelers are choosing another airport despite its location and convenience. Anecdotally, we might believe that this is due to high fares, or lack of flexible schedules, or airline preferences for those not at SBA, or any number of other combined factors. Only further study will shed empirical light on these questions. Staff would like to recommend allocating resources for additional research study. Customer research is an investment with a good rate of return in the form of more focused and effective marketing, which in turn supports growth in passenger demand for service at SBA.

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