



CASE STUDY

**REWARDS PROGRAM REVAMP HIGHLIGHTS
IMPACT ON CUSTOMER LOYALTY**

BRITISH AIRWAYS



BRAND TRACKING WITH QUESTBRAND

Companies must monitor their brand health in real-time to ensure that their actions effectively build brand equity and positive consumer sentiment. Our industry-leading platform, **QuestBrand** by The Harris Poll, provides the real-time insights into consumer perceptions that companies need. This always-on business intelligence tool surveys thousands of people daily to keep a continuous pulse on the brand metrics essential to business leaders.

This case study explores how British Airways' recent loyalty program changes affected customer engagement. After proposing a spending-based rewards system, customer concerns led the airline to reconsider its changes and demonstrated the value of loyalty programs in customer retention.

Since 1982, British Airways has used its Executive Club to strengthen customer loyalty by offering frequent fliers redeemable points for flights, travel upgrades, and discounts. After years of refining its established system, British Airways **announced in December** that it would **rename its Executive Club to the British Airways Club and change how fliers earn points** beginning on April 1 – but many UK customers weren't onboard with the changes.

Previously, frequent British Airways fliers could rack up tier points based on their flight's duration. Each tier - Blue, Bronze, Silver, and Gold - offers unique flier-benefits like **lounge access, additional free bag checking, and seat selection**. In the new British Airways Club, **customers would have to spend more to earn points and to maintain a higher tier status**. Travelers would be given **1 tier point for every £1** cashed in on flight price, seat selection, extra baggage, and vacation bookings through British Airways.

Many British Airways customers voiced their concerns about the new system, which would **benefit higher-paying travelers over price-sensitive passengers who frequently fly economy**. Customer dissatisfaction was reflected in consumers' reported usage of the airline (Figure 1). According to data from QuestBrand, **brand usage** (UK adults who say that they book with British Airways) **saw a significant decline following the December announcement**.

Additionally, the percentage of UK adults who say that they would recommend British Airways dropped after the loyalty program changes were announced.

UK ADULTS WHO USE BRITISH AIRWAYS - 12 WEEK TRENDED AVERAGE



Figure 1. QuestBrand. 8/29/2024-2/24/2025. Base: UK Adults, n=1,699

While fliers voiced their concerns regarding the British Airways Club, **competitor Virgin Atlantic used this opportunity to swoop in and attract dissatisfied British Airways customers** with an exclusive status offer to become a **“points million air.”** Virgin Atlantic proposed that it would draw the names of **five UK-based consumers** who status match to Virgin Atlantic Gold or Silver, by February 2025, to win 1,000,000 non-expiring Virgin Points.

Whether UK fliers were turning to Virgin Atlantic or another airline, **British Airways’ brand momentum continued to drop** after the announced changes (Figure 2). The potential loss of customers on the horizon **encouraged British Airways to alter its upcoming loyalty program changes just a month later.**

To satisfy disgruntled customers, British Airways **opened opportunities for fliers to qualify for tiers based on their number of flights taken** (25 flights for Bronze and 50 flights for Silver) and **extended their bonus tier point system** for fliers to earn points for trips booked before December 31, 2025.

BRITISH AIRWAYS’ POSITIVE BRAND MOMENTUM AMONG UK ADULTS – 12 WEEK TRENDED AVERAGE

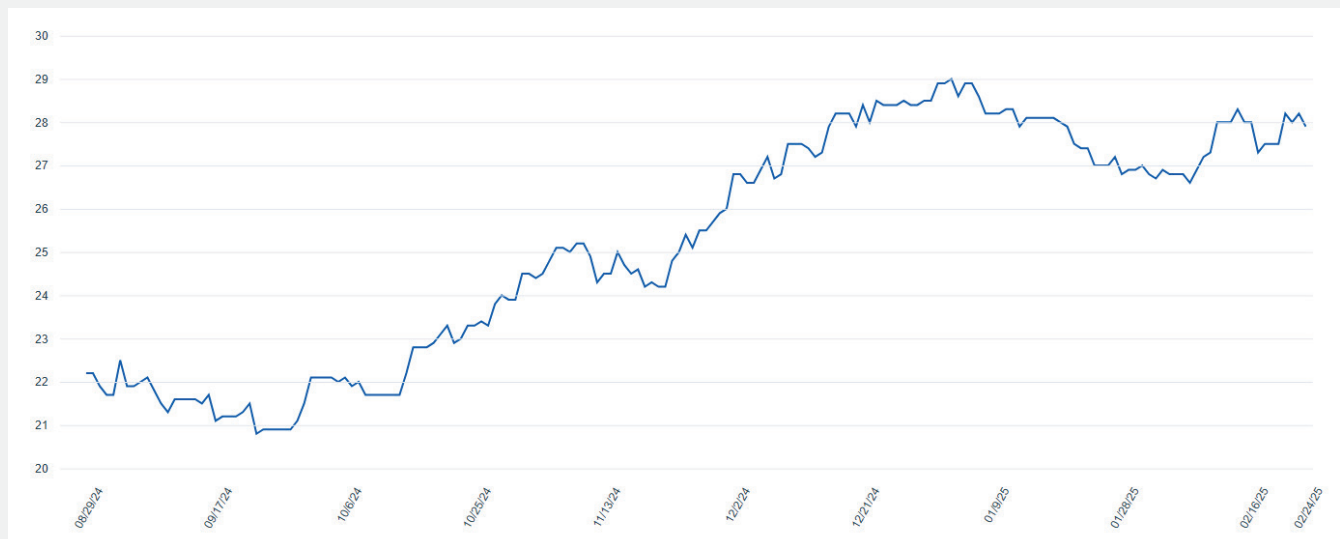


Figure 2. QuestBrand 8/29/2024-2/24/2025. Base: UK Adults, n=1,699

On February 5, British Airways laid out its **new Bonus Tier Point offer**, which **allows customers to earn up to 550 additional points per flight** if they book a British Airways flight before December 31, 2025 for travel starting from April 1, 2025.

Customers reacted positively to the announcement, and British Airways saw an uptick in positive brand momentum in February (Figure 2). The airline’s redemption could be attributed to its **acknowledgement of customer concerns and quick action to find a solution.**

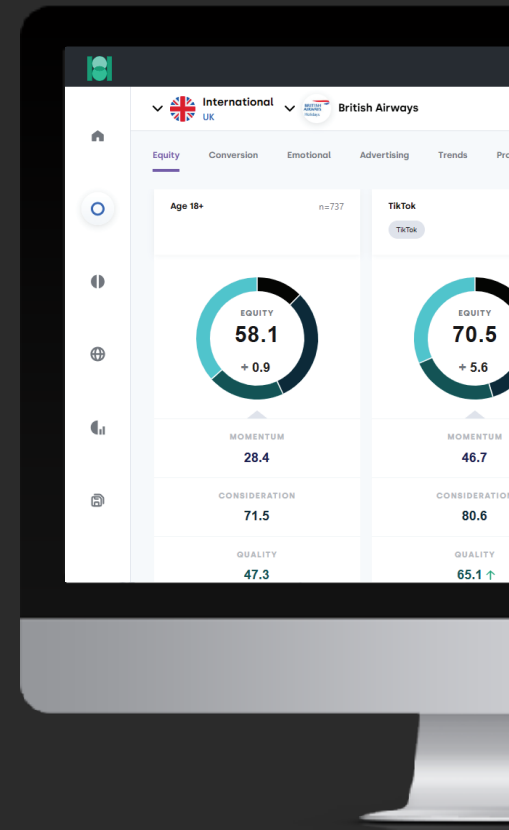
British Airways’ loyalty program changes reflect a broader question in how companies should structure their reward systems. **While some travelers may benefit from a price-focused tier system, frequent fliers may feel priced out of the new system, despite their long-term loyalty to British Airways.** Leisure travelers **could turn elsewhere** if they don’t feel appreciated as frequent customers.

British Airways’ approach to its loyalty program highlights the **importance of weighing customer satisfaction alongside financial sustainability.** Only time will tell if the British Airways Club is successful, but the airline’s changes emphasize that fostering customer loyalty is built on more than tier points.

WHAT DOES QUESTBRAND DATA SAY ABOUT YOUR BRAND?

QuestBrand offers real-time consumer insights for your brand. Don't wait to hear what consumers are saying about you and your competitors - schedule a demo to learn more.

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METHODOLOGY

This survey was conducted online within the United Kingdom between August 29, 2024 and February 24, 2025 among 1,699 UK adults by The Harris Poll via QuestBrand.

ABOUT QUESTBRAND BY THE HARRIS POLL

QuestBrand is a brand management software tool created by The Harris Poll that collects real-time feedback for thousands of brands and their consumer segments for more informed brand and campaign monitoring. We help research professionals and in-house marketers better understand how their brand is resonating with customers and communities.

The Harris Poll is a global public opinion, analytics, and market research consultancy that strives to reveal society's authentic values to inspire leaders to create a better tomorrow. With a global research reach of more than 90 countries, Harris offers advisory services across sectors to world leaders, CEOs, and business decision-makers with state-of-the-art analytics, real-time software services, and practitioners in marketing, reputation, customer experience, trends, futures, and thought leadership/research-for-public release, The Harris Poll translates shifting social sentiment into a competitive marketplace advantage.