

In conversation with
Mr. Sajid Khan | Country Manager at Fiji Airways
SIMSR Alum Batch 1993-95



- 1. With an illustrious career of over 2 decades, what has been the most memorable moment so far in your career?**
 - A. When I was working with Million Air, I had the opportunity to fly with Mr. Shahrukh Khan in our helicopter, for promotion of 'Dil Se' movie at Essel World. While returning back Juhu Aerodrome was closed because of heavy rains. We had to find an alternative solution for landing in mid air and after various dramatic twists and turns we were able to land at Santacruz airport. That was a memorable moment. During my two years at Million Air besides being able to meet various dignitaries like Mr. Ratan Tata, Mr. Pramod Mahajan & Mr. Amitabh Bachchan it gave me the opportunity to be around helicopters and planes which I am most passionate about.

- 2. During the course of your journey in the airline business, what transformations have you seen in customer segments and needs?**
 - A. Now, the customers have become far more educated. They know exactly what they want. Earlier they had to go to travel agents for bookings and obtaining information. With all the information available at their fingertip and facility of online bookings, the interface has become much easier. This means that the marketing strategy now has to be that of instant or quicker gratification to be able to catch as much of travelling decisions of the target group. Also with the millennial leading the number of the target audience it has become imperative to know the pulse of social media and current trends if the strategy is to be successful.

- 3. Recently Fiji airways and Air India announced a code share agreement. How is Fiji airways planning to expand in India?**
 - A. Fiji airways is an offline carrier in India. It does not land in India. So, through the code share agreement Fiji airways and Air India will be able to offer flights to destinations that they don't actually serve. Customers can reach to our operating base in Singapore and Hongkong through Air India airline. People always look for something different to explore. Fiji airways believe in providing better experience and high quality service which will be the unique selling point of Fiji airways for India. I can proudly say that in the last 2 years my team and I, along with Fiji shareholders, have been able to increase awareness about Fiji in India and increase the customer base.

- 4. Having worked in well known leading international airlines like Fiji, South African Airways, Emirates, etc., what difference do you see in work culture of different airlines?**
 - A. According to me people make the culture of the airline. But yes, all of these organisations were quite varied. So, if you assign a personality to every airline KLM is more open, warm and friendly, Emirates is brainy, South African Airways was like the Air India of South Africa, big and with extensive network and Fiji Airways is an island experience, professional, easy & small but in terms of business the most profitable airline in South Pacific.

- 5. What are the changes that you have seen in sales and marketing segments through all the years you have been in this industry?**
- A. In this era of digitization marketing is all about providing application of knowledge and experience at the right time. For airline industry the differentiating factor should be service quality and not cost. But this awareness is lacking and needs to be the decision criteria for trade and airlines both. According to me, marketing needs to be an improvisation of local market, local culture, the people who are involved in it and the way people in the industry deal with it.
- 6. What is the biggest challenge that is faced while marketing a country airline?**
- A. Fiji airways is an offline carrier. Hence, maintaining connections with Singapore and Hongkong is a huge challenge. India has the potential to beat any market that Fiji airways currently operate in.
- 7. What do you do when you are offline?**
- A. My passion is Paragliding. Basically, I like doing outdoor activities.
- 8. If you have to relive your days at SIMSR, how differently would you like to live them?**
- A. SIMSR has become a powerhouse now. I would relive the days at SIMSR proudly exploring my daily routine but with the new infrastructure.
- 9. What are some of the significant learning you had in your two years at SIMSR?**
- A. SIMSR gave me clarity of thought for my career. The marketing lectures were eye-opener for me. Once a professor told us that any tooth brush can clean teeth but it is how you sell it that matters. That triggered my interest in advertising and marketing.
- 10. What would be your advice for the students/young alumni who are starting their career?**
- A. I see people switching jobs for money. In long term it hinders. So, I would advise students to be loyal to the company and contribute to its development by implementing the learning obtained from the company. No amount of education beats local experience. Education is required to learn how to handle the business. But if you do not have the insight into your business you cannot succeed. Insight can never beat knowledge.

RAPID FIRE QUESTIONS:

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| a) Role Model: KLM Royal Dutch Airlines | e) Favourite hangout spot near SIMSR: Santosh Restaurant |
| b) Success Mantra: Enjoy what you do | f) Favourite holiday destination: Bali |
| c) Phrase you use quite often: Potatoes can't be boiled twice | g) Favourite Movie: Kuch Kuch Hota Hai |
| d) Word that describes you: Aviator | h) Favourite cuisine: Japanese and South India |

Interviewed & drafted by: Sameer Suri & Meera Valera