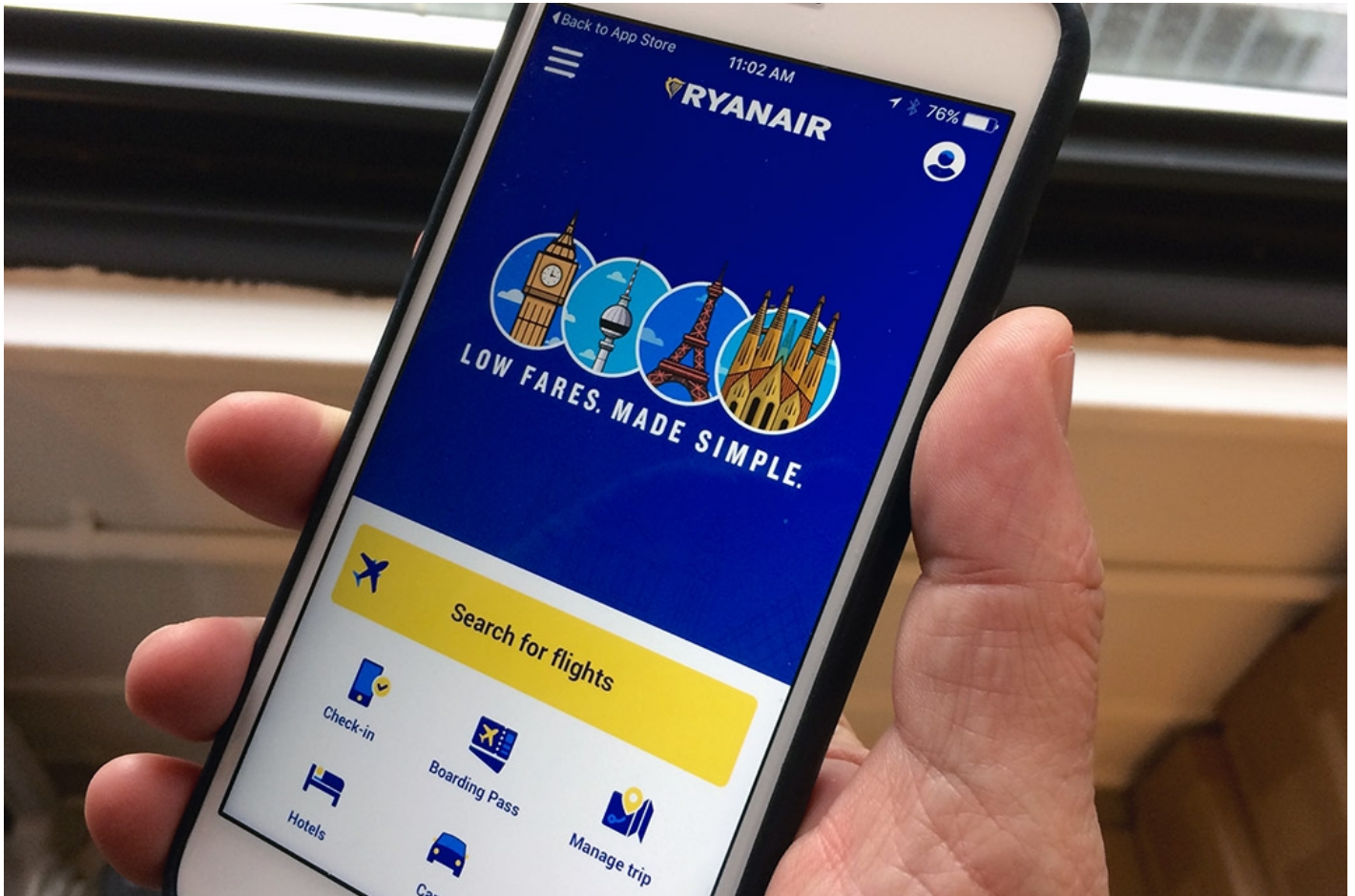




RYANAIR IS INVITING PASSENGERS TO COMPLAIN VIA APP

News / Airlines



Ryanair Holding Plc. once notorious for its spartan cabins and hands-off attitude to customer service, plans to give passengers still unconvinced by a recent charm offensive a platform to make their gripes clear.

Europe's biggest low-cost carrier will introduce a "Rate My Flight" mobile feature as part of the third phase of its Always Getting Better program, according to Chief Executive Officer Michael O'Leary, who once derided passengers as "stupid" for incurring fines by failing to print boarding passes.

The application will ping people as soon as they land and ask them to evaluate each element of their flight, from boarding through food and drink provision to crew helpfulness and overall service standards, said O'Leary, who began a push upmarket in 2014 in a bid to attract more families and business travelers.

Ryanair will use responses from the feedback program, trialed in March and due to go live in May, to sharpen its focus on customer concerns, the CEO said in Dublin on Tuesday, three days after

making global headlines as the owner of Rule the World, winner of Britain's leading Grand National horse race.

Other initiatives announced Tuesday include fares bundling allocated seats, priority boarding and a checked bag for leisure flyers, and extra travel flexibility combined with airport fast-tracking for corporate clients.

Load Factor

O'Leary said Ryanair's occupancy rates confirm the wisdom of dropping the ultra-no-frills approach in favor of paid-for extras, more flights to primary airports and a user friendly website — as well as a reduction in the notorious boarding pass fines. The carrier's load factor averaged 92 percent in 2015, versus 81 percent before Always Getting Better was introduced.

Ryanair attracted more than 100 million travelers for the first time in 2015 and is set to overtake EasyJet Plc as the biggest airline operating in the U.K., with a total of 41 million passengers forecast this year, O'Leary said.

The emphasis on customer focus and the business market has led Ryanair to target a client base closer to that of Luton, England-based EasyJet, Europe's No. 2 discount carrier, which it has emulated in embracing allocated seating and other add-ons. Digital upgrades including one-click purchasing, online account top-ups, gift cards and destination guides have been borrowed from other companies outside of aviation, Chief Marketing Officer Kenny Jacobs said.

Brussels Impact

O'Leary said Ryanair will take a hit of 10 million euros to 20 million euros (\$11 million-\$23 million) against earnings for the fiscal fourth quarter ended March 31 from the impact of the March 22 terror attacks in Brussels and air traffic control strikes in France. The impact of the Brussels atrocities on demand could also weigh on earnings in the current quarter, he said.

Any plans for trans-Atlantic flights, once mooted by Ryanair as a possibility with more fuel-efficient aircraft, are now "off the table," O'Leary said, adding that it's generally impossible to compete with the Gulf carriers such as Emirates on long-haul routes.

The CEO confirmed that he plans to stay in the top job until 2019 at least, saying his Grand National victory — which followed a month after another of his thoroughbreds won the equally prestigious Cheltenham Gold Cup — remains a distraction rather than a vocation.

"Horse racing is a glorious irrelevancy," he said. "I've still got to be back in the office on Monday."

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