

TRANSPORT > AIRLINES

Behind Finnair's Ambition to Be the Biggest Tweeter in the Skies

Marisa Garcia, Skift

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Time will tell how successful this campaign will prove, but it's clear that Finnair are unwilling to put their birds in a cage. As Sting sang: "If you love somebody, set them free."

—Marisa Garcia



Finnair's Twitter feed on an iPhone. / Skift

Finnish gaming giant Rovio brought the world Angry Birds, but the national carrier feels that happy birds are a far better way to play and win the airline social media game.

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This Thursday, [Finnair](#) will launch a new social media campaign to be “the world’s most Tweeting airline.” To prepare for this event (and more importantly the new social-media-savvy corporate culture to follow) Finnair Social Media Manager, Anna-Kaisa (Aku) Varamäki (who tweets as [@akuvaramaki](#)) is chasing her dream of making Finnair “the world’s most Tweeted Airline.”

Varamäki’s ambition goes far beyond a corporate branded social media feed, to direct of employees to engage actively with the world on Twitter, through their own personal accounts, as brand ambassadors.

“Our goal is to have the largest percentage of employees representing a company on Twitter. That’s what the world’s most Tweeting airline means,” Varamäki tells Skift. “It’s a big job. We’re training 200 employees in 20 training sessions so that they are confident on Twitter.”

To both Aku Varamäki and Joseph Knowles, [@JooseppiKnowles](#), Communications Specialist at Finnair (who spoke with Skift along with Varamäki) getting the airline’s employees personally involved in Finnair’s social media strategy follows naturally from the airline’s hands-on customer service culture.

“A lot of people at Finnair have customer facing roles anyway, and they are used to sincerely engaging with the public in real life.” Knowles tells us. “So why not in social media too?”

Participating in social media as a brand ambassador is voluntary. Employees can decide for themselves whether they want to learn how to communicate on Twitter and be active on the social media platform, but Varamäki and Knowles are confident that employees will want to take part.

“It builds nice relationships,” Varamäki says. “Our employees do not have to do it, but there’s no reason not to.”

Key to the success of the campaign will be the ongoing training sessions, to build employee confidence with the public forum and encourage positive Tweeting practices. Varamäki has carefully considered the social media skills Finnair employees will need, and tailored the intensive training sessions to address those needs. But she feels the most important contribution employees can make on social media is to simply share their experience, giving customers insight into what it’s like to work as part of the Finnair team from day-to-day.

“Our employees are skilled professionals,” Varamäki points out. “And skilled professionals have interesting stories to share.”

It’s a risky move. Both Varamäki and Knowles recognize this. Finnair has recently encountered some disputes with its labor unions over reorganizations—which may lead to more outsourced personnel and a reduction of staff and wages. There is always the chance that the message the employees will voice may not be what the airline would want.

Of course, as Varamäki and Knowles point out, this is true of any company and any employee. By taking the initiative to train employees on positive social media strategies, and generating excitement and pride within the company for the effort, they feel that these risks are reduced.

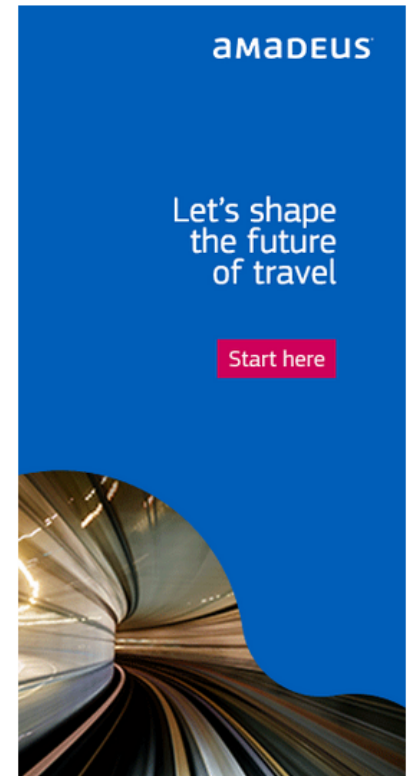
Both Varamäki and Knowles are eager to point out that treating employees as equals, with respect and trust, is inherent to Finnish culture.

“A major part of this is that you have to trust employees. We trust our employees with a lot of key operations responsibilities. If we can trust them to fly planes, then we can trust them on Twitter,” Knowles says.

The airline has recently introduced a number of clever innovations to its products and services, and they work in close collaboration with Helsinki airport to improve the passenger experience.

Members of the airline and the airport have created the [Quality Hunters](#) crowd-sourced initiative, and involving key social media influencers within the aviation and travel sector to help them brainstorm and provide feedback on potential innovations. For the Thursday employee training session and launch of the [#Finnairtweets](#) campaign, Finnair has invited member of the Quality Hunters team to participate and the response has been positive.

But Varamäki and Knowles put the emphasis of Thursday’s event on their employees. They will host a series of speakers on the day, to get employees excited about the personal role they can play in spreading the good word about Finnair. One of the speakers is Arman Alizad ([@titmeister](#)), who is a master tailor, fashion columnist and popular Finnish TV-personality, with more than 63,000 Twitter followers. And apparently Santa Claus will also stop by for a visit.



The airline will continue to Tweet general updates to its customers through its handle at [@Finnair](#) and answer specific questions on flights, customer service issues through its handle [@FinnairHelps](#), and share company news through [@FinnairNews](#). Their successful sales platform on [Facebook](#) will continue to be a key part of their social media activities.

With its growth in Asian markets continuing, Finnair has a dedicated Twitter feed [@FinnairJapan](#) and Knowles tells us Finnair's Weibo [account](#) is also active.

We had the distinct impression there was a lot of love in this initiative, for Finnair customers and for Finnair employees too.

Marisa Garcia has worked in aviation since 1994, spending 16 years on the design and manufacturing of cabin interiors and cabin safety equipment. She shares insights gained from this experience on [Flight Chic](#) and Tweets as [@designerjet](#).

Image of Finnair A320 Cabin Attendant from Finnair

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