

## Airline ‘Twares’ are ‘Cheep’: Twitter’s Impact on Airline Bookings



Twitter continues to capture the attention and imagination of marketers; the site has posted twenty consecutive months of all time highs in site traffic. Its 23M+ monthly user base (as of July) provides a huge opportunity for brand marketers to directly engage customers, drive brand awareness, and drive revenue. [Jetblue](#), [Southwest](#) and [United](#) are the most active airline brands on Twitter with approximately 1M, 460K & 30K ‘followers’ respectively (at the time of writing). Leveraging its ability to track consumer behavior across the internet, Compete measured the directional potential for twitter traffic to drive airline business by quantifying the extent to which shoppers of these airlines also visited Twitter.

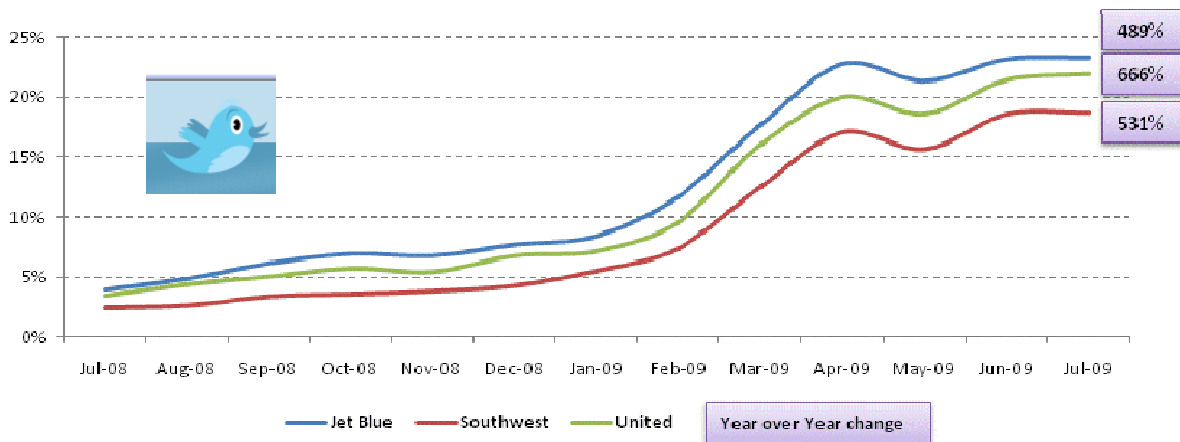
At a high level:

- Airline site visitors’ propensity to visit Twitter is up nearly six-fold year-over-year
- Moreover, there is a positive correlation between airlines on Twitter than promote low rates and airlines’ booking success

### Visitors to Twitter

Approximately 1 in 5 visitors to each of the three airline websites in July 2009 also visited Twitter.com that month (not accounting for those using mobile clients or other software applications). That figure is up a staggering 562% on average from a year ago. The gains are relatively consistent across the three airlines assessed.

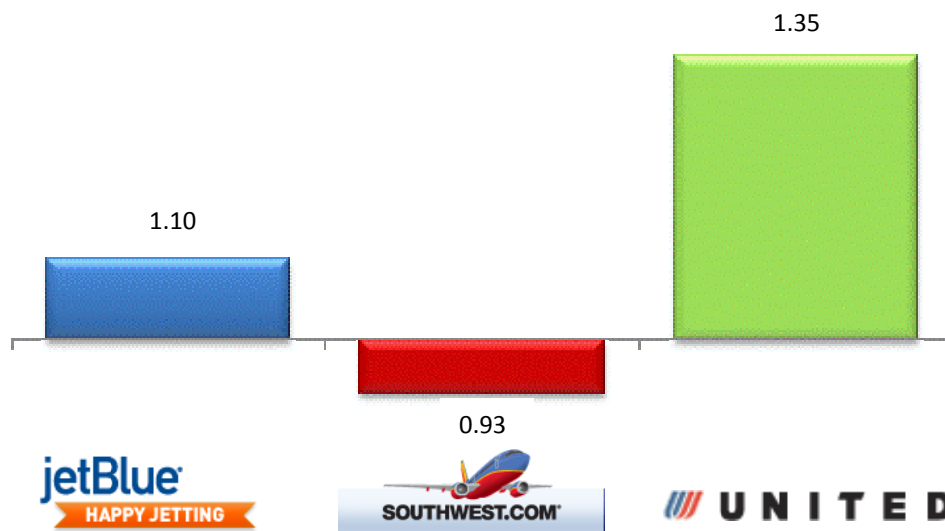
**% of site visitors to airline supplier sites that also visit Twitter.com in the same month**  
(July 2008 – July 2009)



### Connecting Twitter to Revenue

Overlap is only part of the story; the real end-game is measuring the impact on business. A key challenge for marketers is to employ the right metrics to measure progress. To do that, Compete indexed the July conversion rate of airline supplier shoppers who visited Twitter against those who did not (conversion meaning visiting the airline site and booking a trip on-site). The higher the index, the higher the relationship between Twitter and revenue.

**Twitter Conversion Rate Lift: Airline site visitors that also visited Twitter.com indexed to airline site visitors who did not visit Twitter.com**



While all three airline sites have similar Twitter.com visitation rates (first chart), there are clear differences in the Twitter conversion lift experienced.

- United & JetBlue visitors who also visited Twitter in July 2009 were **more likely** to complete a booking than visitors who did not visit Twitter (10% and 35% more likely, respectively)
- Southwest visitors who also visited Twitter were 7% **less likely** to complete a booking that those who did not

Findings could indicate that Twitter played an important role in driving business for United and Jet Blue, but had a negative effect on Southwest bookings. But there is more to the story: United and JetBlue use Twitter not primarily to engage and inform customers (as Southwest & other brands do) but to heavily **promote very low airfares**. In fact, JetBlue launched a Twitter [page](#) dedicated to these low fare promotions or “Cheeps” on July 6<sup>th</sup>, while United has been promoting Twitter-only “Twares” since May 20<sup>th</sup>. Given that each airline’s visitors posted a similar growth in Twitter overlap and given the difference in the index results, it is possible that some **Southwest visitors could have booked on JetBlue or United** after seeing the twitter promotions.

**Implications**

Given Twitter’s explosive growth, airline & other travel marketers will be lured into using it to engage current customers, influence prospects and execute promotions. As with any media, the richest success comes from employing the soundest strategy and the best intelligence, but at the same time implementing quickly and dynamically. Given social media’s widespread reach, missteps will become public quickly, and a sound strategy is needed to [mitigate blowback from well-publicized consumer complaints](#).



The best social media intelligence will allow marketers to understand where to find customers and prospects, to measure success in engaging those consumers, and to connect to ROI on an ongoing basis (just as Armano alludes to in his fifth point in the [Harvard Business Review](#)). Connecting social media efforts directly to ROI, while challenging, will allow for quick identification of innovative successes (including those of rivals) and for early detection of when the space becomes so saturated with a technique that it loses its effectiveness. This will help the travel industry optimize their efforts to integrate with and participate meaningfully on Twitter and other social networks.

