JETBLUE WANTS TO BE THE ONLY AIRLINE WITH FREE WI-FI ON EVERY FLIGHT

News / Airlines

When JetBlue recently introduced checked baggage fees, it gave the title of Only Large U.S. Airline With Free Checked Bags to Southwest. (I just made that title up, but Southwest is very proud of the distinction.)

But JetBlue might have a way to make it up to passengers. On Wednesday, the carrier announced progress in making free in-flight Wi-Fi -- the carrier calls its service Fly-Fi -- available on all of its planes.

"Our Fly-Fi model has proven that there is a way to offer customers more without adding extra costs to their travel," JetBlue's vice president of brand and product development Jamie Perry said in a statement.

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Most airlines charge for in-flight Wi-Fi, at varying prices that passengers often feel is too high - especially when the connection is spotty or slow. On a short flight, purchasing access to Wi-Fi on the plane could cost as little as US$5, while on longer domestic flights passengers can pay upward of US$40.

The airline announced it has installed Fly-Fi on more than 150 Airbus A320 and A321 aircraft, and the first connected Embraer E190 aircraft took its inaugural flight this week. The entire JetBlue fleet should have Wi-Fi by fall of 2016.

"Soon every JetBlue customer will step onboard knowing their aircraft is equipped with free, fast Internet," said Perry.

JetBlue could be onto something: A survey by Honeywell Aerospace last year found 66% of travelers were influenced by the availability of in-flight Wi-Fi when purchasing a flight. 66% of travelers were influenced by the availability of in-flight Wi-Fi when purchasing a flight. That number has since likely increased.

Virgin America is rolling out faster Wi-Fi that will even handle Netflix streaming on some of its aircraft, and is offering the service for free - but only until March 2016. After that, the airline is expected to introduce a new pricing structure.

Reliable in-flight Wi-Fi was incredibly valuable to those surveyed: 25% said they would risk being on standby if the flight had faster Wi-Fi, and 45% said they'd go through airport security screening TWICE for better Wi-Fi.

JetBlue flies to U.S., Caribbean and a handful of Central and South American destinations.

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