upstreamworks

UNITED AIRLINES

CUSTOMER STORY · TRAVEL & HOSPITALITY

United Airlines unveils “Agent on Demand”, a new customer-service experience

Scan a QR code at the airport and reach a live United agent by video, chat or voice — on your own phone, no download. Powered by Upstream Works AgentNow on Cisco.

KEY RESULTS

Scan to talk

a QR code or web link connects passengers to a live agent — no app download

100+

languages handled in a single chat conversation

3 channels

video, chat and audio in one session, switched to suit the customer

2.8M

travelers over Labor Day weekend 2023, when United promoted the service

1 United Airlines sought to redefine its customer service

United Airlines and Upstream Works ran a joint innovation project to transform CX in the world’s largest airline. The result is Agent on Demand: a seamless, virtual customer-service experience with the ability to share video, chat and audio based on the customer’s needs or preferences — built with Upstream Works on United’s Cisco foundation.

2 The challenge: day-of-travel help, without the line

Whatever a traveler needed in the airport — a seat change, a rebooking, a question — used to mean waiting in line or seeking out a gate agent. On busy days that is where the strain lands: in-person gate agents managing large volumes of people with routine questions as well as delays, rerouting and rebooking.

United knew that to make Agent on Demand really work it would need to be built for its customers to simply "click and connect." To make this vision a reality, United brought in Upstream Works and leveraged its Cisco foundation to design the service.

According to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), Labor Day weekend 2023 was the year's third-busiest travel period. For United, the holiday meant managing over 2.8 million travelers between the Friday before and the Tuesday after the weekend — the perfect time to promote its latest customer-service solution.

3 The solution: Agent on Demand, powered by AgentNow

Today, United's Agent on Demand is promoted on large QR codes displayed on digital signage throughout its airports, with messages like "Need travel assistance?" or "Get travel help now." A traveler scans the code with their smartphone (or opens the United mobile app) and is immediately connected to an agent, who can change a seat, change a flight, answer a question — whatever would have happened at the desk — by video, chat or voice.

> *Agent on Demand has been a great disruptive innovation for United Airlines. It's allowed us to move from the traditional in-person customer service into this virtual world. We can take our physical agents, put them on the Upstream platform along with Cisco, and allow this to globally serve our customers for their day-of-travel needs. You scan a QR code and you're immediately connected to an agent — whatever you needed to have happen in the airport physically, you can now do while you're waiting on your coffee at the United Club.*
>
> **Rob Bence**
> Director, Digital Technology, Airports (Global), United Airlines — customer innovation spotlight, September 2023

Accessibility was one very important feature for United. Upstream Works developed the solution to seamlessly share video, chat or audio based on preferences, and to manage over 100 different languages into single chat messaging. As a spokesperson for United put it, "This leveled up our ability to serve those with disabilities really quickly; it's a huge win – for us and the customer – that whatever language is spoken on the phone can be handled with that agent rather than wasting time tracking down someone who can communicate with that particular customer."

The key to success was to realize United's goal of simplicity. As Jeff Palmer, Chief Revenue Officer at Upstream Works, puts it: "We had to consider the vagaries of different customers' cell phones. For instance, when a cell phone browser is minimized the system alerts the customer through text message that an agent is ready to communicate, while notifying the agent that the customer is not ready to take messages."

Built on the Cisco foundation United already ran

United innovated on top of its existing Cisco contact center (UCCE) rather than replacing it. In Rob Bence's words: "That's a great use of our existing infrastructure — a well-engineered solution that allowed us to seamlessly transition from our traditional phone calls into a digital program. We've got the WebRTC infrastructure where you can share video, chat or audio based on a customer's choice or the need of the use case, and that allows us to modernize and shift traffic over into this space, but also gives flexibility to have a lot of metadata, intelligent routing and language translations that are normally not available."

- Video
- Chat
- Voice
- QR code and web link
- Cisco UCCE foundation
- 100+ languages

4 In the news

News of the service from United's Chicago O'Hare hub caught the attention of the local NBC affiliate, which featured Agent on Demand in a piece on Labor Day travel (September 2023). That Thanksgiving, NBC's Today Show braved the crowds to show how travelers connect to an agent by scanning the QR codes displayed throughout the airport (November 2023).

In March 2024 Upstream Works announced AgentNow, the on-demand engagement capability behind the service: "United Airlines is the first Upstream Works client to leverage the new AgentNow engagement solution, through a service the airline named Agent on Demand. For United's customers, the service enables travelers to skip the line at the information desk and connect directly with agents through their smartphone and using voice, chat, or video."

5 Watch the story

Customer innovation spotlight: United Airlines

Rob Bence (United Airlines) and Jeff Palmer (Upstream Works) on the Agent on Demand project. 3 min.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fsA20j3SMg0

Agent on Demand demo

The passenger journey from QR code to a live agent, from both sides of the conversation.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wOAE_HDTvTQ

Fireside chat with United Airlines and Cisco

Hosted by Upstream Works during Cisco IMPACT.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nwo46jEHAko

6 What it means for other organizations

As airlines and other large organizations look to their customer-service engagement strategies, providing on-demand agents to handle specific tasks could shorten wait times and provide more knowledgeable information that quickly satisfies customer requests. With AgentNow, organizations can tap into on-demand and non-contact-center agents to support surges in demand and to supplement finite on-site capability — and the agent sees the full journey, interaction history and context, so nobody has to repeat themselves.

7 Where to go next

Read this story online, with the three films embedded: **upstreamworks.com/resources/case-studies/united-airlines/**. For how a QR code reaches a live video agent in your own airport, branch or clinic, see **upstreamworks.com/answers/qr-code-live-agent-video-airport/**, or request a demo below.

About Agent on Demand and AgentNow

Agent on Demand is United Airlines' name for its service. AgentNow is the Upstream Works capability behind it: instant customer support via live video, voice and chat, reached through QR codes, web links, mobile devices and kiosks, with the interaction on the agent's desktop workspace. AgentNow video is built into every Totalix™ edition, and AgentNow is also available as a standalone solution.

upstreamworks.com/products/agentnow

About Upstream Works

Upstream Works makes contact-center and customer-experience software. Its platform, Totalix™, is a CRM-embeddable agent workspace for human and AI agents that goes live inside a business application in minutes in the cloud. Upstream Works sells through more than 50 partners and is ISO 27001:2022, SOC 2 and HIPAA compliant. Headquartered in Woodbridge, Ontario, with 25 years in CX.

www.upstreamworks.com · Read this story online

See it on **your** use case.

Request a demo and the engineer who knows your platform will set it up with you — a live tenant, not a slide deck.

upstreamworks.com/demo

upstreamworks

25 YEARS OF CX EXPERIENCE

ISO 27001:2022 compliant · SOC 2 compliant · HIPAA compliant

Upstream Works Software Ltd. · 7777 Weston Road, Suite 1000, Woodbridge, Ontario L4L 0G9, Canada · info@upstreamworks.com · +1 905 660 0969 · upstreamworks.com

Compiled November 2026 from Upstream Works' published material on the project: the customer innovation spotlight interview with United Airlines (September 2023), the Agent on Demand demo, the Cisco IMPACT fireside chat, and the press releases of 5 September 2023, 28 November 2023 and 25 March 2024. The service runs on United's Cisco contact center foundation with the Upstream Works platform; AgentNow video is built into every Totalix™ edition today and is also available standalone. Document UW-CS-UNITED-2611. © 2026 Upstream Works Software Ltd. All rights reserved. Upstream Works, Totalix™, AgentNow and their respective logos are trademarks of Upstream Works Software Ltd. All other trademarks and logos belong to their respective owners.