

Jaunting Conversations about CVG's Future- Part 1

Written by Jenny Kerr

Thursday, 19 January 2012 10:27 - Last Updated Monday, 23 January 2012 15:35

Jill and I had the opportunity to drive to CVG and meet with Jay Brock and Molly Flanagan,

who head up the marketing and social media arm of our international airport. The point of our discussions with them was not to necessarily draw a conclusion or receive concrete answers to the many questions and difficulties posed about the airport, but rather to commence a discussion -- one in which the veil of secrecy between CVG and the populace can become more transparent.



Jaunting's mission to improve our airport began last year when I spoke at Ignite Cincinnati. My topic was [*I Don't Feel Like Driving to the Dayton Airport Anymore*](#) and I was completely nervous to do this speech. However, no matter how nervous I felt beforehand, I truly believed that Cincinnati had suffered too long with high airfare prices. Throughout my research, I had the opportunity to connect with Meghan Glynn, who is the Vice President of external affairs, as well as some other outside sources. Meghan was more than kind to me as she talked about the challenges CVG faces with existing contracts and attracting air service to the region.

The response after my speech was overwhelming, and our [online website survey](#) about the airport drew responses from every age range. One particular response stood out to me: a

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65-year-old grandmother wrote in to say she has to drive to Louisville and fly out of there so she can go visit her grandkids in another state. How sad.

Fast forward to the beginning of this year...

Meghan Glynn again reached out to try and connect me with Jay and Molly, whom she recently hired. Jill and I talked over email and gladly accepted the invitation to meet for lunch on Tuesday, January 17th at CVG.

Jay and Molly met us in Terminal 3, where we bypassed security. They were very welcoming as we walked the tunnels toward Concourse B. I forget sometimes how nice and airy our airport is, but it tends to look empty with the lack of passengers traveling through.

We arrived at Wolfgang Puck's and settled on a round table to get to know each other better. Molly's background is in the political realm and Jay was a former employee of the Kroger Corp. Both just recently began their career paths at the airport, but they are eager to start making some positive strides in the right direction. They are both good additions to the team and Jill and I warmed to them from the get-go.

Before we ordered, we cut right to the chase and started in on the many questions we hoped would be answered. I guess you could call it "the elephant in the room": **Why are all of the prices too high here in Cincinnati? Is it Delta? Is it the landing fees? Is it both?**

Before we could even delve any further on this topic, to our surprise, the waitress overheard our conversation and chimed right in with her two cents. She went on to describe that even though she works at the airport, her son pays for her to drive to Louisville or Dayton to fly and see him, and she works at CVG! She went on to wish us the best of luck in figuring this all out. I think she even threw in a "God Bless you all" at the end of her plea. Although it was surprising for an outsider to be so vocal during our meeting, it's not uncommon to hear this sort of story from just about every Cincinnati I know.

After placing our lunch order, we continued on with this conversation. Jill and I mentioned our comments from our friends on Facebook and some of the results from our [blog survey](#), basically reiterating how much price influences the public's decision to either fly here or drive to a neighboring airport.

Another point we brought up is that there are roughly three categories of travelers: **the business traveler, the leisure traveler and the family traveler.**

Not only do we want European and exotic destinations, we want the everyday places like Minneapolis or Birmingham to visit people who are important in our lives.

Namely, based on the passionate responses to our [CVG origin/destination survey](#) and some comments on Facebook, we discussed the heated negative reaction to the "

Think CVG First

" Campaign. Our followers and friends have made it clear that it angers them to have a campaign such as this (thanks

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Jason Duff

for your candid FB response) Of course we think of CVG first, it's our most convenient airport, but our flying habits are driven foremost by pricing, and we are willing to drive an hour or two to save hundreds of dollars. They mentioned they are now focusing on their new campaign, "

Get Here, Get There, Get Home

" referring to the availability of CVG's non-stop services compared to the other regional airports. While this is true, many leisure travelers will drive elsewhere if they can save significant money.

What we really need at CVG is a good dose of hope. We need to know that things are getting better. It's almost like there is a curtain in front of us, the local consumer, and no one is sure what is going in. We asked a few questions that we still are waiting on the answers. Jay and Molly did their best, but since they are not able to share all information at the present, Jill and I didn't want to press too hard.

What we do know is that CVG has become creative in trying to lower their landing fees by diversifying their property (The Enquirer has already reported on this in a previous article). They are currently in the works of leasing out land to potential businesses that could cut costs by being close the airport. Always a good step in the right direction.

Jay was really excited to give us a sneak peak on the plans of reopening of Concourse A. Their current theme is "***Rolling on the River***" referring to the Ohio River, obviously. While on this topic, Jill and I continued to share some more of our friends' thoughts about what the airport should be like. Our friend **Sean Celi** wrote in saying we need to show people what Cincinnati is known for and we agree. I have been reading a range of

[blog posts](#) lately

of some of the most interesting airport amenities in the world. Some bordered on the side of ridiculous, but some ideas were just downright cool. For example, at Munich Airport, Lufthansa installed a real beer garden complete with long tables and views of the Alps. At Heathrow, they have single rooms for rent by the hour, which may sound strange to some outside of the airport, but if you're facing a long layover, this can be quite appealing. The point of these examples is that it would be great to think ahead of the curve and be the airport that everyone is talking about. Not necessarily be the ones to spend the most money, but to err on the side of memorable. Another friend,

Annabelle Comisar

, wrote in to say we needed to bring a European spa called

[Be Relax](#)

to Concourse A. It's a hit in London and Paris, so why not show the world we are not as far behind the times as Mark Twain once thought us to be?

There are still a few things that we need to uncover. It can get mildly sticky since CVG is a quasi-government entity but is working with several different airlines, existing contracts etc.

Some of the sensitive topics we came across:

- **Where do we stand with bringing a low-cost carrier into CVG? How involved in courting a low-cost carrier can CVG get without upsetting current tenants/carriers?**
- **Which low-cost carriers have they negotiated with at present?**

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- **How much does the current 30-year contract with Delta (ending in 2015) impact that situation with wooing other carriers? Why does Delta still have so much clout if they've reduced their flights, lessened the hub status, and announced an increase in their ticket costs?**
- **Why is a Delta flight cheaper out of Dayton? Is CVG as an airport just too expensive? Or is Delta controlling pricing? Is it fault of county, state, or board?**

Our biggest question ultimately was:

What can we do?

What can Jaunting do to participate in the revitalization of our airport?

What can the locals do to show their support for a low-cost carrier?

More specifically, what we really want to know is that if a low-cost carrier is on the fence about whether they want to establish service here or not, can we find out about this? What are the legal limits to knowing what is happening? Twitter and Facebook have helped bring about real revolutions throughout the world. Could we have our own mini-revolution here in Cincinnati? What if, say, Jet Blue or Southwest aren't sure if there is a need for more air service here in town. What we could do is inundate their Twitter and Facebook feeds, show them we want them here and are prepared to start using them if they keep their prices competitive to the region. By our survey responses and public confession of being frustrated with CVG, we could actually let our voices be heard.

We hope that after reading some of these things, you too will feel a sense of ownership over this situation and continue to support us in our fight for better air service. When the time comes, we may need you to voice your support in large numbers in favor of competitive fares and airline diversification.

To sum things up, Jay and Molly were enthusiastic about hearing feedback on the airport, both good and bad. They are determined to open the lines of communication between our tri-state area and CVG. They will be getting back to us with any information they are permitted to release.

In the meantime, we are dedicated to getting to the bottom of everything. We will be utilizing other avenues of getting information, and also delving into the opposition to airport improvement. It's hard to believe, but almost everything is political in some sense. We will certainly inform our readership of the latest happenings, and we look forward to involving the entire Cincinnati area in the improvement of our CVG airport.