

## Delta closes India call center

Associated Press

July 28, 2004, 4:26 PM CDT

ATLANTA -- Financially troubled Delta Air Lines Inc. said today it was shuttering one of its three call centers in India, but declined to discuss whether the move was related to a survey asking customers if they would be willing to pay a fee to speak to a U.S.-based agent rather than one in India.

The question about the call fee was contained in an online survey sent earlier this summer to select frequent fliers.

Spokeswoman Peggy Estes said today the airline has no plans to charge customers who prefer to talk to U.S. representatives. She could not say, however, if it is something Delta might do in the future, or discuss the survey's results.

"In today's environment, we continue to look at all areas of our business," Estes said. "We are looking at many things, and asking a lot of questions."

A spokesperson for Sykes Enterprises Inc. of Tampa, Fla., which operates the closing center, did not return a phone call seeking comment.

Also today, Delta chief executive Gerald Grinstein met with employees in a closed-door meeting to discuss some elements of the airline's much-anticipated restructuring plan.

Grinstein told them the overhaul will likely include a simpler fare structure or a loyalty program and higher performance standards and better training for employees. The plan is expected to be submitted to Delta's board in late August.

Delta is seeking to cut costs and raise additional revenue to avoid bankruptcy.

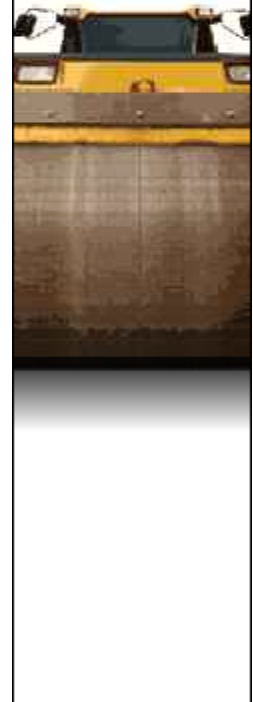
Outsourcing some call center functions has saved Delta about \$25 million a year, though its 11 other call centers remain in the United States.

Analysts weren't sure what to make of Delta's survey.

"Desperate people do desperate things and this kind of looks like one of those situations," Terry Trippler, an airline industry expert in Minneapolis, said of Delta's fee question. "I don't think this will fly."

Some Delta customers agreed. "That's just one step above charging to use the lavatories on airplanes," said Bruce Schobel, a Delta frequent flier from Princeton, N.J.

Advertisement



"This goes to the core of Delta's problems," said Art Epstein, an eye doctor and Delta frequent flier from Long Island, N.Y. ``Why would I pay to get service that helps me fly your airline?"

Outsourcing is relatively unusual in the airline industry.

Elk Grove Township-based United Air Lines Inc. and Fort Worth, Texas-based American Airlines have call centers overseas, but those centers are staffed with company employees.

Arlington, Va.-based US Airways Group, Inc. outsources some customer service inquiries made through the Internet to a U.S.-based company.

Delta shares today closed down 13 cents, or 2.5 percent, at \$5.12 on the New York Stock Exchange.

*Copyright © 2004, [Chicago Tribune](#)*