

Dispatcher: the most important job before takeoff

The whole world as vocational field: Dispatcher Anastassios Dingas studies world map. He was freshly trained like his colleagues at Air Berlin. Ruediger Pohl (4th from left) leads the department, in which Enrico Albrecht, Cathrin Polke, Falco Bier and Alexander Lorenz work full time.

They are true organization geniuses before the takeoff of each air of Berlin airplane. Dispatcher, also air service advisors mentioned, examine the weather before the start, compute the fuel and the optimal flight route. Greatest objective: the security of the passengers. By Miriam Mueller

“We have much responsibility, using all gathered information.”

The runways at the airport in Pristina are blanketed in fog, in Cape Canaveral in Florida is a rocket launch scheduled soon, and in Spain a bad weather system is building on and over the Atlantic ocean is a new military restricted area. As the twelve dispatchers of Air Berlin begin their shift, no two days are alike. The air routes for approximately 700 flights must be planned by the coworkers daily in three shifts. The flight routes of the short and medium range are calculated by machine; however, the long-range routes are entered by the dispatchers manually. If the destination airport is foggy, the dispatchers will use a higher category jet, which may also land under these conditions. And with short runways the dispatchers plan airplanes with winglets. These curved structures at wing ends, which Air Berlin initially used on their Boeing fleet, permit a faster taking off. Turbulence and thunderstorms are by the way the most frequent causes for reroute.

“We plan in such a way that we do not deviate under normal conditions any more than ten minutes from the optimal flying time. However there are also deviations up to one hour possible, for example with tropical hurricanes”, say department manager Rüdiger Pohl, who was early navigator with Interflug.

Also a rocket launch requires additional separation standards for airplanes, just as a military restricted area.

In the area, in which the twelve coworkers of the dispatcher department work, maps with the airways of the world hang on the walls. On monitors the day’s flights are represented in the form of multicolored bars. What looks like a Excel spread-sheet analysis, is the basis for the working day. Depending on which colors the bars become, the stress level of the coworkers may rise.

Green bars mean the flights are on time, red means that an airplane has been delayed. “We have much responsibility, with gathering all information, which is necessary for the flight plan computation,” says the department manager. The dispatchers are essentially the partners of the pilots at the ground.

Certificate: Dispatchers of Air Berlin are trained in the USA and receive a special school diploma and license following all successful examinations.

The flight captains in the cockpit can always rely on the correct computations of the dispatcher colleagues.

The training of the dispatchers is fastidious, theoretical contents agrees to 90 per cent with pilot instruction. Graduating students receive their diploma from Sheffield School of Aeronautics in the US (Florida). The company is considered as the most well-known and most renowned dispatcher school in the USA. In a multi-week training course the beginning dispatchers learn first the theory: weather, Radio navigation, and equipment service customer like for example hydraulics and pneumatics. Three months of practical training at the side of an experienced dispatcher of Air Berlin follow. Afterwards the coworkers are entitled to provide long-distance flight routes independently.

"A highest goal is the security of the passengers, afterwards their satisfaction and the economy of the enterprise follow", say Ruediger Pohl. He and his colleagues worry however not only about routing, but since they are partners for the colleagues in the cockpit during the flight, for example there may be an emergency on board. The dispatchers notify the flight crew by radio, where the next airport with medical supply lies.

The dispatchers cannot explain one detail regarding weight calculation of an airplane however: The average weight of a woman calculated by the European union amounts to 70 kilos on a line flight, with a charter flight however a kilo less. A male passenger however compared with line flights on a charter flight is different by five kilos, and weighs only 83 Kilos instead of 88 Kilos. Why? A mystery of the bureaucracy.