



Dear all,

It's strange to think but Virgin Atlantic has now been flying for half my lifetime. I can still remember the day we started when Lord King from British Airways forecasted our early demise, claiming we were "too old to rock n roll, too young to fly". Well together we proved how wrong he was.

Over the past 33 years, Virgin Atlantic has made a massive difference to people's flying experience and changed the airline industry for the better. By focusing on our people and our customers first, we've raised the quality on our own planes and forced our rivals to improve their services too. Our success has helped to create Virgin America and Virgin Australia, airlines that transformed the flying experience in their respective countries too.

But it hasn't always been easy and during those 33 years we've had to first withstand British Airways' 'Dirty Tricks' campaign, which tried to put us out of business and where we won the largest libel settlement in British history. We distributed the money equally to everyone who worked at Virgin at the time. I'm sure there are plenty of you who will remember receiving the 'BA Christmas Bonus'!

We've had to endure a consistently uneven playing field with British Airways keeping a stranglehold on Heathrow slots, enabling it to feed its long-haul operation from a myriad of short haul flights across the UK and Europe. It has merged with Iberia to form IAG, acquired rivals such as BMI, Aer Lingus and Vueling, increasing its presence at Heathrow and extending its network.

We survived the trauma of 9/11 and the collapse in international travel that followed; then picked ourselves up again after the global financial crises of 2008.

And now we have Brexit, which before it's even happened, has had a negative effect on the financial performance of both our holiday company and the airline, principally due to the collapse in the value of the pound.

Through all of these challenges, our wonderful teams have steered Virgin Atlantic into calmer waters.

One of the best moves we made nearly five years ago was tying up with Delta Air Lines, to create a joint venture across the Atlantic. Part of the rationale was to provide a competitive alternative to BA and American Airlines' alliance and it has created a strong platform for us to promote and support our brand in this highly competitive market.

Willie Walsh predicted that the Virgin Atlantic brand would disappear within five years as a result. Whether childishly or bravely, he also said he'd accept a knee in the groin from me if it didn't. Well Willie, that five year point is up this December. And Virgin Atlantic is still flying strong!

Delta has helped us considerably with feed from America, but because we don't have more slots at Heathrow or Gatwick we're unable to enjoy feed from Europe or provide extra onward journeys for those customers we are now carrying to London. To address this we've been in discussions with Delta's partners in Europe, Air France and KLM, to give us that network and connections.



Today, I'm delighted to say that we've agreed with Air France-KLM and Delta our collective intention to form a four way strategic joint venture, which will be extremely beneficial to our airline, our customers and the brand we all love so dearly. We've also agreed with our partners how important it is the Virgin Atlantic brand lives on as part of our arrangement.

As I get a little older, I want to be certain that all the necessary building blocks are in place for Virgin Atlantic to continue to prosper and grow for the next 50 years. The airline industry has consolidated over Virgin Atlantic's lifetime and it's now our turn to put ourselves at the heart of an important alliance, to create a stronger customer champion and build an airline which provides great opportunities for our team around the world. With these three partners in place and with me – and one day, the wider Branson family – still very much involved, we have the foundations to make sure this is so.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard Branson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, looping initial 'R'.

Richard Branson