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Airlines lost 10,000 bags a day in '05

By Marilyn Adams, USA TODAY

U.S. airlines last year lost about 10,000 bags a day on average, the worst performance since 1990.

The rate of lost suitcase reports per 1,000 passengers on flights soared 23% year earlier, according to recent numbers from the U.S. Department of Transportation. Among the reasons: a surge in the number of passengers, airline budget cuts and tighter inspections of luggage.

LOST LUGGAGE

Airline	Reports per 1,000 passengers	Year-over-year increase
US Airways	9.62	81%
Delta Air Lines	7.09	37%
American Airlines	5.92	25%
Northwest Airlines	4.86	15%
America West Airlines	4.33	9%
United Airlines	4.28	9%
Southwest Airlines	4.25	27%
Continental Airlines	4.12	15%

Source: Dept. of Transportation

2005 numbers:

- US Airways, which exited Chapter 11 bankruptcy last year, had the highest rate of major carriers.
- Southwest Airlines' rate of lost bags jumped nearly 27%. Southwest blames airline's cranky new bag systems in Baltimore, Las Vegas and Phoenix.
- Delta Air Lines, third-biggest airline, lost more bags than any other carrier. Customers filed 573,419 lost bag reports.

Barry Maher, who gives speeches on customer service, was one. Delta lost bags last April on a trip from Ontario, Cal., to Roanoke, Va. Maher rushed to change his shirt, slacks and underwear so he could give a speech. His bags arrived at time for him to return home. On the trip back, Delta lost both bags again. Maher was "uncaring," he says.

Delta spokeswoman Chris Kelly said Delta, now in Chapter 11 bankruptcy, its bag system needs work.

"Delta is focused on making significant progress," she said.

US Airways says flight crew shortages last year. The auditor flew US A

times. It lost his bags six times. He says he's "lucky" because the losses usually happened on his way home.

US Airways customer service chief Anthony Mulé says, "It will get better." US Airways, which merged in bankruptcy with America West, has added ground workers and new equipment for handling bags.

Wine executive David Kelly lost his suitcase when American Airlines canceled his flight to New York last summer but didn't take his bag off the plane. His bag reappeared 48 hours later. This, he says, is why "overhead compartments are always overflowing."

Contributing: Barbara Hansen

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