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# ETIHAD AIRWAYS



**Etihad recently signed a deal to sponsor the Ferrari Formula One team**

It is hard to believe Etihad Airways is not even five years old. The Abu Dhabi-based carrier already serves 45 destinations across five continents and has a well recognised global brand. Much of Etihad's early success can be credited to its marketing strategy, which captured the attention of the Airline Strategy Awards judges. In selecting Etihad for this year's marketing award, the judges said they were impressed with how it has "created a strong brand with a high quality service in an extremely short time period".

While marketing has been an important component of Etihad's strategy since its November 2003 launch, executive-vice president of marketing and product Peter Baumgartner says it has taken on even more significance over the last year as the carrier has moved out of the start-up phase: "We're not a start-up anymore but we're still a young airline. We have this small window of opportunity to get it right across the board. There's no legacy and we have to make sure not to create one."

Baumgartner says over the last year Etihad has invested heavily in new services at all "touch points" as it repositioned its brand and aligned its marketing strategy to support the new brand. From the limousine service that whisks premium passengers to the airport, to the check-in desk and lounge "at every touch point you see the same brand".

Etihad opened new lounges at Abu Dhabi earlier this year and is now rolling out its new lounge concept to key destinations. On board, Etihad has just overhauled its premium in-flight service, introducing new amenity kits and a new on-demand menu that lets the passenger decide when and how much to eat. Dining is not benchmarked against other leading carriers but five-star hotels and restaurants. "We take our inspiration from outside the airline industry," Baumgartner says.

This, or to "avoid undifferentiated superiority", is the first of four principles driving Etihad's marketing strategy. In the second principle, "be inspirational to the individual", Etihad aims to behave like a small airline. That means a private jet experience in first class and a personalised service in business and even economy. The third principle, "behave like a luxury brand but don't lose sight of the entire spectrum", has a similar meaning. Baumgartner says religious and labour traffic is also important to Etihad: "We are a luxury brand and position ourselves



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**PETER BAUMGARTNER**

EVP marketing & product, Etihad Airways

as a luxury brand, but everybody has a right to fly Etihad and experience a touch of Etihad luxury."

The fourth principle involves showcasing Abu Dhabi and aligning Abu Dhabi's new brand with Etihad's. Accordingly Etihad early this year dropped its slogan "change the way you see the world" in favour of "from Abu Dhabi to the world". As Abu Dhabi's leading consumer brand, Etihad wants to play a leading role in Abu Dhabi's vision to become a premier upscale tourist destination. It is the title sponsor for the new Abu Dhabi Grand Prix, which will launch in 2009 as the last race in the Formula One season. Earlier this year it brought a football clinic hosted by the UK's Chelsea Football Club, which it sponsors, to the children of Abu Dhabi. "It's strategic engagement," Baumgartner explains. "It's not paying your money and putting your logo on the stadium and shirt and that's it."

Overseas, Etihad sponsors rock concerts and other local events, including hurling which Baumgartner says "gave us overnight fame in Ireland". To support its marketing strategy, Etihad has also invested heavily in its loyalty programme and website, both of which feature several industry innovations. "What we've achieved at Etihad it has taken other airlines much longer to do," he says.

**BRENDAN SOBIE**

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