



Emirates provides demo flights in US brand push

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By Aarti Shah

SAN FRANCISCO: Airliner Emirates promoted its new, double-decker luxury plane with two demo flights for media and others in California last week. The effort is also part of a larger strategy to increase brand awareness in the US.

The airline, which is part of the Emirates Group wholly owned by the government of Dubai, already provides a New York to Dubai flight, but the event highlighted the new, 489-seat Airbus A380, which was scheduled to start offering departure flights from New York August 8.

Emirates held "familiarization flights" on the plane for a group of journalists and travel coordinators on August 4 in San Francisco and August 5 in Los Angeles. The North American campaign cost about \$500,000, said Boutros Boutros, SVP of media relations, sponsorships, and events at Emirates.

The airline worked with its North American AOR, M. Silver Associates, on the effort, along with Landis Communications in San Francisco and Victoria King PR in Los Angeles. Outreach included top-tier business press, mainstream publications, local media, and travel trades.

"[The demo] is like when you buy a car and first allow people to test it," Boutros said. "It makes a direct contribution to your business and... more likely that you're going to earn [the customer's] business."

However, Emirates, which is planning to launch non-stop flights between LA and Dubai, and San Francisco and Dubai with smaller planes later this year, also used the event to boost knowledge of the brand with American travelers.

"Some people still don't know where Dubai is, or they think that because we're an Arab airline we won't serve alcohol, or they are surprised to see women on board," Boutros said. "It's not that they are ignorant, they just never needed to know. But when they see the airline, they learn."

Despite a tough economic time for airlines, Boutros said the company is "seeing a higher demand" and growing.

Virginia Sheridan, president of M. Silver, said the firm has been working with the airline for several years to promote Dubai as a financial center and progressive destination spot for business and leisure travelers.

"[The airline] is growing and expanding - not cutting amenities," she added.