

Don't let the information age

Economist.com

OPINION
LEADERS

PRINTABLE PAGE VIEW SPONSORED BY

[About sponsorship](#)

Fear of flying

Welcome aboard

Sep 7th 2006

From The Economist print edition

In-flight announcements are not entirely truthful. What might an honest one sound like?

Thinkstock



[Get article background](#)

"GOOD morning, ladies and gentlemen. We are delighted to welcome you aboard Veritas Airways, the airline that tells it like it is. Please ensure that your seat belt is fastened, your seat back is upright and your tray-table is stowed. At Veritas Airways, your safety is our first priority. Actually, that is not quite true: if it were, our seats would be rear-facing, like those in military aircraft, since they are safer in the event of an emergency landing. But then hardly anybody would buy our tickets and we would go bust.

The flight attendants are now pointing out the emergency exits. This is the part of the announcement that you might want to pay attention to. So stop your sudoku for a minute and listen: knowing in advance where the exits are makes a dramatic difference to your chances of survival if we have to evacuate the aircraft. Also, please keep your seat belt fastened when seated, even if the seat-belt light is not illuminated. This is to protect you from the risk of clear-air turbulence, a rare but extremely nasty form of disturbance that can cause severe injury. Imagine the heavy food trolleys jumping into the air and bashing into the overhead lockers, and you will have some idea of how nasty it can be. We don't want to scare you. Still, keep that seat belt fastened all the same.

Your life-jacket can be found under your seat, but please do not remove it now. In fact, do not bother to look for it at all. In the event of a landing on water, an unprecedented miracle will have occurred, because in the history of aviation the number of wide-bodied aircraft that have made successful landings on water is zero. This aircraft is equipped with inflatable slides that detach to form life rafts, not that it makes any difference. Please remove high-heeled shoes before using the slides. We might

as well add that space helmets and anti-gravity belts should also be removed, since even to mention the use of the slides as rafts is to enter the realm of science fiction.

Please switch off all mobile phones, since they can interfere with the aircraft's navigation systems. At least, that's what you've always been told. The real reason to switch them off is because they interfere with mobile networks on the ground, but somehow that doesn't sound quite so good. On most flights a few mobile phones are left on by mistake, so if they were really dangerous we would not allow them on board at all, if you think about it. We will have to come clean about this next year, when we introduce in-flight calling across the Veritas fleet. At that point the prospect of taking a cut of the sky-high calling charges will miraculously cause our safety concerns about mobile phones to evaporate.

On channel 11 of our in-flight entertainment system you will find a video consisting of abstract imagery and a new-age soundtrack, with a voice-over explaining some exercises you can do to reduce the risk of deep-vein thrombosis. We are aware that this video is tedious, but it is not meant to be fun. It is meant to limit our liability in the event of lawsuits.

Once we have reached cruising altitude you will be offered a light meal and a choice of beverages—a word that sounds so much better than just saying 'drinks', don't you think? The purpose of these refreshments is partly to keep you in your seats where you cannot do yourselves or anyone else any harm. Please consume alcohol in moderate quantities so that you become mildly sedated but not rowdy. That said, we can always turn the cabin air-quality down a notch or two to help ensure that you are sufficiently drowsy.

After take-off, the most dangerous part of the flight, the captain will say a few words that will either be so quiet that you will not be able to hear them, or so loud that they could wake the dead. So please sit back, relax and enjoy the flight. We appreciate that you have a choice of airlines and we thank you for choosing Veritas, a member of an incomprehensible alliance of obscure foreign outfits, most of which you have never heard of. Cabin crew, please make sure we have remembered to close the doors. Sorry, I mean: 'Doors to automatic and cross-check'. Thank you for flying Veritas."