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I worked as cabin crew and I'm shocked Virgin is letting staff go bare faced

It's good to move with the times – but we're losing some of the head-turning glamour of the iconic image



Virgin Atlantic's famous ad celebrating 25 years of flying



By Beth Windsor

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As I was scrolling through the news yesterday, I jolted upright at the news that **Virgin Atlantic was "liberating" its female crew members from having to wear make-up.** What did my friends who were still in the job think? Shock was the resounding response in their messages.

After years of adhering to strict grooming rules, this was something none of us saw coming. Turn up to a flight without a perfectly applied red lip, the general consensus was, and you may as well have turned up with no shoes on your feet.

The faces of an airline

This is how strict the world of flying is. Airlines pride themselves on their brand, their look and their product – and the crew are a big part of this. We are the face of the airline, and one that is stared at for hours on end. A lot of time and money goes into designing airline uniforms, and so the corporate line is that it's essential that the personal appearance of crew members fits that look.

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This is the reasoning behind female cabin crew having to wear a certain shade/brand of lipstick, applying mascara and foundation as minimum, painting their nails either red (to match said lipstick) or pink with white tips. Hair has to be styled in a tidy up do with the bare minimum of hair grips showing, tights have to be worn and the height of the black high heels is closely regulated.

These are set requirements for the airlines I've worked for – and it all has to be paid for by staff themselves. And woe betide veering off course – I've known girls to be disciplined for not wearing the correct colour of nail varnish, reported for sporting more than four hair grips and denied permission to dye their hair a certain hair colour.

Checks every 30 minutes on the loos, the pilot... and our lipstick

I will always remember the one cabin-crew manager who conducted an inspection every 30 minutes during a flight to ensure that our lipstick was applied. Of course we had to complete lavatory and pilot checks every 30 minutes, but lipstick?

I don't blame crew for complaining about strict standards and Virgin Atlantic's relaxation of the cosmetics rules certainly makes life easier. It's also giving female staff the choice of wearing trousers (without having to request them). I'd much prefer them to a skirt when it comes to picking something up for a passenger. And British Airways started offering them to female cabin crew in 2016.

But I do think that it's important for cabin crew to look well groomed. With ever-increasing cutbacks to compete with low-cost carriers, it seems the only glamorous thing left in air travel are the cabin crew, and, to me, wearing a nicely tailored skirt by a top designer is no hardship. It certainly doesn't compare to airlines I'd heard of outside of the UK where you could be asked to jump on a pair of scales pre-flight or prove you're wearing a flesh-coloured bra.

A crew need to look like a team

While I like the fact that Virgin is trying to move with the times (it's the first British airline to take this stance on staff make-up), I think it's important to remember that this is a uniformed role, one where all crew must look like a team. Surely this won't be possible when one crew member is wearing trousers with a full face of make-up, but another is barefaced in a skirt?

I always enjoyed taking pride in my appearance at work. Yes, I was there primarily there for safety, not for show, but caring about how I looked meant I cared about my job. Still, it's an interesting move from Virgin Atlantic, the one-time disrupter of the aviation industry and I'm intrigued to see how it will pan out.

I just can't help feeling that the iconic image of glamorous cabin crew turning heads as they walk through an airport in *Catch Me If You Can* wouldn't look quite the same with these new standards. **i**

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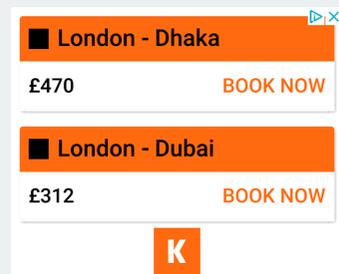
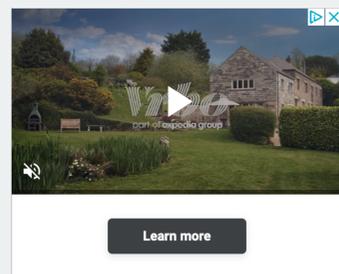
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