

United Breaks Guitars

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"**United Breaks Guitars**" is a protest song by Canadian musician Dave Carroll and his band, Sons of Maxwell. It chronicles a real-life experience of how his guitar was broken during a trip on United Airlines in 2008, and the subsequent reaction from the airline. The song became an immediate YouTube and iTunes hit upon its release in July 2009 and a public relations embarrassment for the airline.

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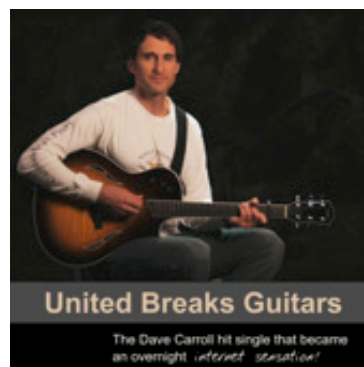
Background of the incident

Musician Dave Carroll said his guitar was broken while in United Airlines' custody. He alleged that he heard a fellow passenger exclaim that baggage handlers on the tarmac at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport were throwing guitars during a layover on his flight from Halifax Stanfield International Airport to Omaha, Nebraska's Eppley Airfield. He arrived at his destination to discover that his \$3,500 Taylor guitar was severely damaged.^[1] Fox News questioned Carroll on why he checked the valuable guitar and Carroll explained that it is difficult to bring guitars onto flights as carry-on luggage.^[2] In his song, he sang that he "alerted three employees who showed complete indifference towards me" when he raised the matter in Chicago. Carroll filed a claim with United Airlines which informed him that he was ineligible for compensation because he had failed to make the claim within its stipulated "standard 24-hour timeframe".^[3]

The song

Carroll says that his fruitless negotiations with the airline for compensation lasted nine months.^[4] Then, thinking what Michael Moore would have done, Carroll wrote a song and created a music video about his experience.^[5] The lyrics include the verse "I should have flown with someone else, or gone by car, 'cause United breaks guitars."^[6] Carroll, who has performed as a solo artist and as a member of the group Sons of Maxwell, wrote two sequel songs related to the events.^[7] The second video, "United Breaks Guitars: Song 2" was released on YouTube on August 17, 2009.^[8] The song takes a humorous look at Carroll's dealings with "the unflappable" United customer

"United Breaks Guitars"



Single by Dave Carroll

Released	July 6, 2009
Format	Digital download
Genre	Country
Length	4:36
Label	Dave Carroll Music
Writer(s)	Dave Carroll

Dave Carroll singles chronology

"United Breaks Guitars"	NA
(2009)	

service employee Ms. Irlweg, and targets the "flawed policies" that she was forced to uphold.^[7] In March 2010, "United Breaks Guitars: Song 3" was released.^[9] The song notes that not all employees at United are "bad apples." The final line of the trilogy of songs is, "They say that you're [United] changing and I hope you do, 'Cause if you don't then who would fly with you?"^[9]

Response

The YouTube video was posted on July 6, 2009. It amassed 150,000 views within one day, prompting United to contact Carroll saying it hoped to right the wrong.^[4] The video garnered over half a million hits by July 9,^[6] 5 million by mid-August 2009,^[3] 10 million by February 2011, and 13.3 million by September 2013.

Media reported the story of the song's instant success and the public relations humiliation for United Airlines.^{[1][5][7]} Attempting to put a positive gloss on the incident and the song, a company spokesman called it "excellent". Rob Bradford, United's managing director of customer solutions, telephoned Carroll to apologize for the foul-up and to ask if the carrier could use the video internally for training.^[6] United mentioned it hoped to learn from the incident, and to change its customer service policy as a result of the incident.^[4]

Bob Taylor, owner of Taylor Guitars, immediately offered Carroll two guitars and other props for his second video.^[7] The song hit number one on the iTunes Music Store the week following its release.^[10] The belated compensation offer of \$3,000, which was donated by United to the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz as a "gesture of goodwill",^[11] failed to undo the damage done to its image.^[12] In response to his protest's success, Carroll posted a video address thanking the public for their support while urging a more understanding and civil attitude towards Ms. Irlweg, who was just doing her job in accordance of mandated company policies in this affair.^[13]

Since the incident, Carroll has been in great demand as a speaker on customer service. On one of his trips as a speaker, United Airlines lost his luggage.^[10]

In December 2009, *Time* magazine named "United Breaks Guitars" No. 7 on its list of the Top 10 Viral Videos of 2009.^[14]

In January 2012, Carroll and "United Breaks Guitars" were featured in the CBC/CNBC documentary *Customer (Dis)Service*.

In May 2012, Carroll published a book, *United Breaks Guitars: The Power of One Voice in the Age of Social Media*,^[15] detailing his experiences.

In January 2013, the success of Carroll's online protest was used by the German television and news service Tagesschau to exemplify a new kind of threat facing corporations in the internet age.^[16]

In June 2013, the NBC TV *Today* program's panel discussed "how to properly complain and get what you want" and used a Carroll video as an example of a good way to complain while remaining "respectful" and "not yelling".

Stock price effect

Within 4 days of the video being posted online, United Airlines' stock price fell 10%, costing stockholders about \$180 million in value.^[17] However, American, Continental, Delta, and Southwest Airlines also had drops in their stock price on that date, and that United's stock price had varied widely all that quarter, including some days with drops greater than 10% in value.^[*citation needed*]

See also

- List of YouTube personalities
- United.com

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External links

- "United Breaks Guitars" video (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5YGc4zOqozo>)
- United Breaks Guitars (<http://www.davecarrollmusic.com/story/united-breaks-guitars>), Dave Carroll's Blog of the incident (July 7, 2009). Retrieved July 8, 2009.

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Categories: 2009 songs | Dave Carroll songs | Internet memes | Protest songs | Songs about aircraft | United Airlines

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