Corporate & Commercial – case study

Virgin and BA face Nigeria airline challenge

By Tracey Boles

A NIGERIAN airline is taking on British Airways and Virgin Atlantic between London and Lagos as part of a £40million ($60million) international expansion.

Privately owned Arik Air started flying on the route in December. It has also recently secured rights to 11 international routes including New York, Shanghai and Dubai.

The airline, which flies daily from Heathrow to Lagos, has invested $54billion on Boeing and Airbus aircraft and has a fleet of 20 planes. It is hoping to fill what it sees as a gap in the market now that Virgin Nigeria has pulled off the London route to concentrate on domestic services. Managing director Dr Michael Arumemi-Ikhide said: "Our aim now is to extend our passenger expectations internationally, become the carrier of choice in the West African region and demonstrate our credentials as the flagship airline for Nigeria and the gateway to West Africa."

Virgin Atlantic, which is in dispute with the government of the oil-rich West African state, is selling its 49 per cent stake in Virgin Nigeria.

Bids go in tomorrow for Gatwick Airport, which has been put up for sale by BAA to allay concerns that it operates a monopoly. Up to five teams are expected to bid, with the airport set to fetch between £1.6billion and £1.8billion.

Arik Air

Objectives – The PR Office was appointed by Nigerian airline **Arik Air** to:

•Launch Arik Air International in the UK

•Build awareness of the brand amongst targeted audiences

•Create a distinctive personality for the brand

•Make Nigerians proud to travel on their 'national airline'

Strategy – The PR programme, developed and being implemented by The PR Office, has been designed to make Arik Air International synonymous with and a champion of all things Nigerian.

Activity – The PR Office provides Arik Air with consultancy on corporate representation, media relations, communications support, events management and sponsorship strategy.

A selection of results to date include:

•Press interviews for the Chairman with Daily Mail, Daily Express, Aerospace International, Invest in Nigeria, African Business, TTG, Flight International, Airline World, African Business, Financial Times

•Crisis communications plan for Arik Air

•Organised corporate lunch at The Dorchester for the launch of the airline

•Development of a sponsorship strategy for Arik Air for corporate and community purposes as well as advising on a corporate social responsibility programme