



VATSIM User Survey 2006 – Executive Summary

Introduction

The first ever user survey for VATSIM was carried out online in April 2006. The data will be used extensively by VATSIM staff to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses in the service we provide and inform future developments. This document is an executive summary of the findings. The full report is available at <http://www.vatsim.net/archives/minutes/survey.doc>

Our thanks are due to Jeff Clark and his colleagues for developing and implementing the survey. The list of those involved can be found in the full report. We would also like to thank the 6,691 people who took the time to complete our survey. We do this for them, and we need to always remember this.

The respondents

The survey was marketed to all VATSIM members, and also to the flight simulation community via popular websites and mailing lists. 6,691 people responded.

- The commonest ways to have found out about VATSIM are through Flight Simulation forums (42%) and Internet searching (26%) Respondents were of all ages from 13 years (the minimum age for membership) The most common age group was 26-36 (27%)
- Only 0.7% are female
- 62% use a high performance computer and 36% a medium range one.
- 94% use have a broadband internet connection, with 51% having a connection of 1Mb or greater
- 35% of VATSIM users have real-world flying experience, most of whom are private pilots. 5% are involved in ATC or its support.

Flying experience

- 92% have flown on VATSIM
- 23% of VATSIM pilots responding have less than 1 year's online flying experience, while 19% have more than 5 years
- 47% fly online at least 11 hours a month
- The main reasons for not flying online more are lack of time (41%) and lack of ATC when/ where pilots want to fly (21%)
- 63% fly with a virtual airline, and 45% of these do so for at least 11 hours a month
- British Airways Virtual and Delta Virtual Airlines were the most commonly listed VA's.

Why choose VATSIM?

Pilots were asked to indicate agreement or disagreement with a number of statements about why they might prefer VATSIM to other networks. All the statements received a positive response - the strongest agreement was with the statement "I prefer the attitude to realism on this network" and the least agreement with "I find this network more helpful for newer pilots/controllers" and "My VA wants me to fly on this network".

Choosing where to fly

A majority of pilots suggested they choose to fly based on where there is ATC at the time, but they also felt that the quality of the ATC is important and the professionalism of the controllers is more important than their friendliness. They generally say that they do not avoid particular areas because of prior bad experiences with ATC.

Pilots were also asked which areas they fly in most and the time of day they prefer. The "top" five were London, Los Angeles, Frankfurt, Atlanta and Melbourne. The preferred time of day is largely in the evenings (local time). A range of possible reasons were offered to pilots as to why they chose particular areas to fly in, and the full report shows how each ACC/ARTCC scored.

Some of the top-rated facilities include Munich for its level of staffing, Wien (Vienna) for its charts, websites and quality of ATC, and Mexico for the quality of ATC and friendliness.

Online events

72% of VATSIM pilots participate in online events, and 41% feel there aren't enough. Most popular are large fly-ins and IFR events. The most popular days are Friday, Saturday and Sunday, with over half of the respondents preferring 1800-2100z. 75% of pilots are happy with no more than a week's notice.

Currently event notices are posted on websites and forums, and just over half of pilots read www.vatsim.net and the main forum at least once a week. However 48% would prefer to be notified of events by e-mail.

Why do some pilots not choose VATSIM?

The survey also asked about networks that pilots had tried and didn't like. 278 pilots didn't like VATSIM - the commonest reason being given was that there was not enough traffic online to make it interesting, followed by lack of ATC, and the system being too complicated to use. However there was strong disagreement with the suggestion that the reason they didn't stay at VATSIM was because of lack of understanding, time, hardware, or language skills.

Pilot Training

63% of respondents had taken part in some form of pilot training and almost 50% felt that pilots should undergo and pass a mandatory pilot training test before being allowed to connect online. There was a lot of interest in participating in pilot training, and using a rating system to demonstrate skill and advance in rank, but a very strong view that pilot ratings should be entirely voluntary, and that pilots shouldn't be excluded from certain airports or events because of their rating level.

Controlling

Of the 4463 respondents who classed themselves as principally VATSIM-users, 66% also controlled on the network. Of those who said they hadn't controlled, the commonest reason was not having an interest in controlling, although issues around training not being easily available, and having too much to learn were also raised.

In conclusion

The full survey results have been distributed to all VATSIM staff for further consideration and action. We intend to use the information to provide a better and more responsive service, and will repeat the survey in the future to make sure that we really are meeting pilots' needs. Our thanks go to those who developed and implemented the survey, everyone who answered the questions, and to all the pilots out there who make online flying and controlling such an enjoyable and stimulating experience.

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