

Sky wars

In the battle to dominate the budget airline market, Ryanair and EasyJet are the bitterest of rivals.

1 How important are the following factors for you when flying? Mark each on a scale of (1) to (5): (1) = not important: (5) = very important. Compare and discuss your response with a partner.

punctuality	comfort	luggage allowance	in-flight meals / drinks
cost	speedy boarding	customer service	flying directly to destination

2 Read the paragraph headings (a-d). Skim the article and match the headings to the correct paragraphs (1-4).
(a) The reluctant consumer **(b) Divided opinions** **(c) A misleading ad?** **(d) Out-of-court settlement**

Budget airline rivalry

[1] Ryanair versus EasyJet: there is little love lost between these two budget airline rivals. They often produce adverts designed to damage their competitor's reputation. Last month, Ryanair brought out an advert depicting the EasyJet boss Stelios Hajii-Iannou as Pinocchio, claiming EasyJet refused to publish their punctuality statistics. Not surprisingly, the EasyJet boss sued Ryanair chief Michael O'Leary for libel. He won an apology, plus £50,000 for charity. The case did not go to court. EasyJet maintained Ryanair had accused them falsely, and information on time performance appears in the annual report. Victory to EasyJet.

[2] Going to Frankfurt? You can fly Ryanair to a little place called Hahn, miles from your final destination. Earlier this year, an EasyJet advert attacking Ryanair stated: 'Who loves flying you to the place you actually booked?' The ASA - the advertising standards agency, ruled that this advert was unfair. The watchdog stated that while Ryanair does fly passengers to the nearby airports listed in the ad, rather than

to the cities themselves, this is made clear to potential passengers. Victory to Ryanair.

[3] So, how do you feel about Ryanair? Are you a fan or not? Supporters point out that O'Leary is quite possibly the most successful airline boss in the world. The brand is strong: 'we do it cheaper!' He is to be admired for his entrepreneurship. Detractors complain about hidden costs; the large credit card fees - £10 per booking. Extra charges for luggage, for printing a boarding pass at the airport or for speedy boarding; the high cost of in-flight meals and drinks. Many customers are unhappy with Ryanair's approach to customer service. Earlier this year, Ryanair received a fine for €3 million for leaving passengers stranded.

[4] What is extraordinary is that those that hate the company actually go back for more! As O'Leary said recently, 'We don't mind if you hate us, just keep flying'. According to him, his apologies, like the one just made to EasyJet, simply generate more publicity. How? People go to the website and they notice '£3 a seat in September'...and they buy it. Any publicity is good publicity, according to O'Leary. Perhaps instead of knocking this controversial manager, we should sit up and take more notice of him.

3 Read the complete article. Describe the two adverts. Summarise the two viewpoints of Ryanair.

4 Identify words in the article from their definitions:

- (a) made a legal claim against someone, because they have done something bad to you (paragraph 1)
- (b) the illegal act of writing things about someone that are not true (paragraph 1)
- (c) an organization that works to stop people from doing illegal things in business (paragraph 2)
- (d) left somewhere with no way of going anywhere else (paragraph 3)
- (e) something that divides opinion in people (paragraph 4)

5 Work in small groups to discuss the questions. Be ready to report back to the class.

- (a) Do you fly using budget airlines? If so, are your experiences positive or negative?
- (b) 'Any publicity is good publicity' Do you agree? Give reasons or examples.
- (c) Can you think of any other advertisements which you feel are misleading? Why?