Marketing Doctor

Marketing Check-up

Spirit Airlines

As of September 30, 2025

Condition: Critical

Premium seats, budget name

Spirit Airlines built its name on one promise: the lowest fare, with everything else sold separately. As travellers shifted toward premium options and costs rose, that promise stopped being enough. Spirit spent two years in merger deals, launched premium options late and filed for bankruptcy twice in less than a year. This check-up looks at what happens when the price is the whole brand.

Key takeaways

- Spirit's fare was, in effect, its whole brand position. When the fare is the brand, a rival's discount or a rise in costs leaves little else to sell.
- The no-frills end of the market stagnated while the premium end surged.
- Spirit spent much of 2022 to 2024 planning to be bought. A court blocked the JetBlue deal in January 2024, and the premium push began only that summer.
- Changing what a name means takes years of consistent proof. Spirit started when losses were already piling up, and it filed for bankruptcy again in August 2025.

Marketing health check

Area	Finding
Brand promise	Price only. The fare was the whole brand.
Market	Shrinking. No-frills demand stagnated while premium surged.
New options	Sound idea, late start.
Focus	Distracted by two years of merger deals.
Network	Shrinking. A 25% capacity cut and 11 markets dropped.

Timeline

When	What happened
2022	Spirit agrees a merger with Frontier, then JetBlue outbids it.
Jan 16, 2024	A court blocks the JetBlue deal.
Mar 4, 2024	The JetBlue deal ends.
Jul 2024	Spirit introduces four travel options, including Go Big and Go Comfy, and drops change and cancel fees.
Nov 18, 2024	Spirit files for Chapter 11.
Mar 12, 2025	Spirit emerges from bankruptcy.
Aug 29, 2025	Spirit files for Chapter 11 again.
Sep 2025	Spirit plans to cut capacity by about 25% and leave 11 markets.

What happened: one number, then nothing else

Spirit sold a low base fare and charged extra for items other airlines often include, such as carry-on bags or sodas, as the Associated Press put it. The fare was, in effect, the whole brand position. By late 2024 the AP reported that Spirit's no-frills end of the market had stagnated while the premium end surged.

For two years Spirit planned to be bought. JetBlue outbid Frontier, and on January 16, 2024, a judge blocked the deal, writing that "the consumers that rely on Spirit's unique, low-price model would likely be harmed," as NPR reported. The ruling confirmed that Spirit's low fares mattered to

travellers. It didn't make them profitable.

The diagnosis: a brand with no fallback

- **Price was the only lever.** A brand that competes only on price has no fallback when that lever weakens. Spirit's 2024 revenue drop came from less traffic and lower average fares.
- **The market moved.** Travellers who could afford more were paying for comfort. Spirit had little to offer them.
- **Waiting for a buyer.** Two years spent in merger deals were two years not spent building a reason to choose Spirit.

The treatment: a late move upmarket

In July 2024 Spirit introduced four travel options, including Go Big with a Big Front Seat, snacks, drinks and bags, and Go Comfy with a guaranteed blocked middle seat. All four dropped change and cancel fees. Its chief executive called it "a new era in Spirit's history."

We think the idea was sound. A reason to choose Spirit beyond the base fare is the heart of a value proposition. The timing was not. Changing what a name means takes years of consistent proof. A new look wouldn't help until the promise was settled, as we explain in when to rebrand.

The result: two bankruptcies in under a year

Spirit filed for Chapter 11 in November 2024 and emerged in March 2025. Its chief executive later said that restructuring was "targeted exclusively on reducing Spirit's funded debt and raising equity capital." It eased the debt. It did not fix the brand. Revenue fell about 20% in the second quarter of 2025.

On August 29, 2025, Spirit filed again. It planned to furlough about 270 pilots and said it would cut capacity by about 25% and leave 11 markets.

Lessons for your marketing

1. Price can win customers, but it is a weak place to stop.
2. Build at least one reason to choose you that a competitor can't copy by cutting a price.
3. Don't let a pending sale pause work on your own offer.
4. If you need to move upmarket, start while you still have the cash and time to prove it.
5. Settle on one promise and hold it. Customers need to know what the name means.

The doctor will see you now.

Book a free marketing check-up at marketingdoctor.ca/contact. We'll examine your marketing, show you what's holding growth back and prescribe what to fix first.

Sources

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This check-up uses public information available on September 30, 2025. It is marketing analysis, not investment advice.
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