

PAPARAZZI CONNECTION LEADS TO RESIGNATION OF VIRGIN ATLANTIC EMPLOYEE



A Virgin Atlantic employee quit the company on Thursday after reports surfaced in the Guardian and Press Gazette that she had routinely fed booking information of more than 60 celebrities to paparazzi agency Big Pictures. The list of celebrities whose itinerary was leaked included stars like Madonna and Rihanna; actors Charlize Theron, Kate Winslet, Daniel Radcliffe; comedians Russell Brand and Sacha Cohen and a who's who of U.K. celebrities including Britain's Princess Beatrice. Virgin Atlantic Airways issued a statement terming the allegations as "extremely serious" and that it had launched an investigation into the matter. The Richard Branson owned Virgin Atlantic was a natural preference for high-profile clients, and the company image suffered a shock by the actions of a lone employee. Employees at Big Pictures, and the owner Darryn Lyon were unavailable for comment and did not return emails sent by the media including emails from Guardian and the Associated Press. The nature of official consequences are yet unknown. No police action has yet been initiated and the Information Commissioners Office in Britain issued a statement that the agency would need further enquiries "to establish the precise nature of the alleged incident before deciding what action, if any, needs to be taken." The employee has not yet been identified officially but is rumored to be a junior official who was in charge of looking after high-profile clients. The official statement from the Virgin Airlines mentioned "The incident that has been alleged concerns eight customers' flights booked in 2010 and we are in contact with all of those people." Last year, the media ethics of paparazzi came into question in an enquiry where many celebrities including actors Hugh Grant and Sienna Miller alleged aggressive and intimidating behavior on the part of paparazzi. The owner of Big Picture, Lyons, testified in that matter before a judicial inquiry and had stated he had "no reason" to believe his photographers broke rules in pursuit of pictures. He told the inquiry, "The fact of the matter is that celebrities court publicity when they want to court publicity and then all of a sudden they want to switch it off very, very soon after ... If you are in the public eye, you are looked up to ... We live in a world of voyeurism."

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