

Era Aviation

Lake Charles, Louisiana



Founded in 1947, Era Aviation is the oldest helicopter company in the United States. With a fleet of 50 twin-engine helicopters operating out of 10 bases along the coast, Era Aviation is the third largest provider of helicopter offshore transportation in the Gulf of Mexico. Era's customers are typically oil industry personnel who need transport between shore and their deep-water oil rigs.

The Challenge

The coastline of the Gulf of Mexico is one of the world's most volatile weather regions. Hurricanes roar up from the southeast. In the winter months, cold polar air moves southward over the warm waters of the Gulf, creating "northers"—strong, gusty northerly winds with considerable clouds and rain. Severe northers can last for three days and drive seas to 30 feet or higher.

"We live and die here in the Gulf, summer and winter, by the front," said Rick Oeder, director of operations for Era Aviation in Lake Charles, Louisiana. "They can bring anything from rain to prefrontal fog to generally ugly weather to violent thunderstorms and tornadoes."

The region also gets what Oeder called "pop-up thunderstorms." He said, "You fly out [to an offshore oil rig], and in 15 minutes you turn around and come back the same way. There may be a thunderstorm across your path that wasn't there when you came out."

With helicopters constantly in the air providing services to customers, Era Aviation needed an accurate source of weather data that it could integrate into its flight operations.

The Meteorlogix Solution

It didn't take long for Era Aviation to decide to choose Meteorlogix as its weather provider. "We get people knocking on our door all the time to come in and give presentations on various pieces of equipment," said Oeder. But, he said, MxVision AviationSentry® was the first system they decided to buy immediately after they saw it demonstrated.

"There were a couple of specific things that wowed us," Oeder recalled. "Instead of a 15 to 20-minute lag in the radar picture, it's real-time."

But what "got everyone's attention over and over," said Oeder, was MxVision AviationSentry's ability to interface with the company's moving map display.

In an effort to develop paperless flight operations, Era's IT department created a system that ties together flight times, flight following, maintenance, and accounting, and displays every aircraft in the air—along with its identifier—on Era's moving map, a wall-mounted LCD flat screen. The real-time data feed from MxVision AviationSentry allows Era to display up-to-the-minute weather displays on its flight-following screen.

"By FAA regulations, we have to maintain what's called 'operational control,'" Oeder said, "and we need to do everything that we can do to have better operational control of our aircraft."

Results

Oeder relates that a few months earlier, before the Meteorlogix data was integrated into the company's operations, one of the company's pilots went inadvertent IFR, flying into clouds when he shouldn't have. "He made a mistake," said Oeder. "It can happen to anybody. He came out of it OK—they landed and all that. But had we had better operational control—with the weather depicted across his course on our map—somebody in the radio room would have called and said, 'You really don't want to do that. You need to turn around and go back.'"

In addition to using it to populate its moving map display with live weather images, Era Aviation has placed MxVision AviationSentry systems in every one of its bases. "Each pilot can do a complete weather run-up to find out what the weather is," Oeder said. "He can do a printout. He can get any SIGMETS or AIRMETS. He can get the whole business right there before he takes off."

The Client's View

"[The system's real-time information] was important to me on a personal note, because I live 20 miles north of here, and that's where a tornado was reported touching down. So I got on and clicked in and clicked out and enhanced. I wanted to see where it was relative to my house."

— Rick Oeder, director of operations, Era Aviation

About Meteorlogix

Meteorlogix, DTN's brand of commercial weather services, delivers industry-specific weather management capabilities for its customers to manage business risks, maximize personal safety and minimize financial loss. DTN, a private company based in Omaha, Neb., is the leading business-to-business provider of real-time information services across multiple vertical markets including agriculture, energy, commodity trading, and other weather-sensitive industries. The company delivers on-demand market information, commodity cash prices, industry news and in-depth analysis, and location-specific weather to over 120,000 subscribers.



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