



Carlson Wagonlit Travel®

Allowing the counselor to concentrate on customer service

“Because time to market is critical in today’s environment, their ability to deliver the solution quickly was a key driver in the decision.”

Greg Adams, Vice President of Global Systems Development, Carlson Wagonlit Travel

Need

Amid increasingly stiff competition, brought about by changes in the travel industry as well as the advent of the Internet, Carlson Wagonlit Travel (CWT) management decided to revamp the way it did business. The plan called for consolidating many of its travel counsellors into several call centres around North America.

It also called for the creation of new user-friendly interfaces for call centre workstations, enabling CWT’s counselors to more easily access customer information and fulfil client requests. Also very important was the ability for travelers themselves to access CWT services via self-service entry points such as the Web, wireless devices or voice recognition.

Solution

For the new CWT system to succeed, it needed to link, or ‘talk to,’ the major Global Distribution Systems (GDSs). What’s more, the

link needed to be transparent to travel counselors. To meet this need, we developed and applied the SITA Integration Platform (formerly known as iTravelConnect) software solution. This platform gives access to the major GDSs, airline and rail reservation hosts through a set of common APIs (application program interfaces). SITA Integration Platform – known on the CWT project as the ‘Carlson Gateway’ – provides a seamless link between the newly created CWT system and the world’s major reservation systems.

CWT’s Adams said that SITA Integration Platform proved to be a critical element in his company’s overall solution.

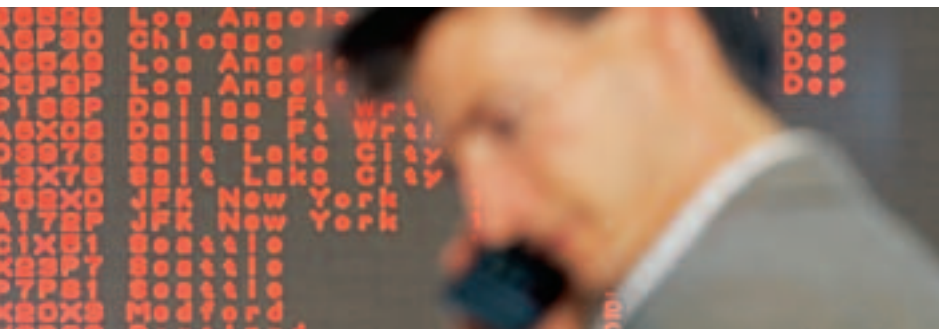
Carlson Wagonlit Travel has a simple charge: To enable corporations to fully leverage their overall travel spend for maximum return on investment.

SITA

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In reality, providing global travel and expense management services for more than 50,000 corporate clients who arrange and rearrange travel plans millions of times each year is no simple task.



At least, it sounds simple

Not even for an industry leader like Carlson Wagonlit Travel, a company with roots to the oldest travel agency chain in the United States, offices in more than 140 countries and annual sales of more than US\$ 12 billion.

That's why several years ago, amid increasingly stiff competition brought about by changes in the travel industry as well as the advent of the Internet, CWT management decided to revamp the way it did business. The plan called for consolidating many of its travel counselors into several call centres around North America. It also called for the creation of new user-friendly interfaces for call-centre workstations, enabling CWT's counsellors to more easily access customer information and fulfil client requests. Also very important was the ability for travellers themselves to access CWT services via self-service entry points such as the Web, wireless devices or voice recognition.

However, before the vision could come together, CWT had to overcome a key behind-the-scenes technological challenge: How to get CWT's new system to "talk to" the various global distribution systems (GDSs) in which the major airlines post prices and availability.

SITA Integration Platform

"As the overall project got under way, we tapped into the best available technology," said Greg Adams, Vice President of Global Systems Development for CWT. "We scanned the marketplace, looking at the strength of the companies out there, the maturity of the software they offered and its scalability, and it quickly became clear that SITA Integration Platform was the solution we were looking for to address the supplier connectivity challenges."

A world leader in application development and integration services with more than 20 years' experience in the travel industry, SITA Passenger and Travel Solutions assigned a team to the CWT project. The challenge at hand was to link the travel counselors and their new user-friendly system to the GDSs.

Although travel counselors and agents have long used the GDSs to reserve flights and make arrangements, these systems, while

informationally comprehensive, can be tricky to navigate and difficult to learn. Each has its own idiosyncrasies. Most travel counselors are expert in only one of the four major systems. As a result, CWT and other travel companies have experienced high training costs and lowered productivity, since counselors generally could work with only one GDS and one set of prices.

CWT saw its new Windows-based system as the solution to these problems. The system would enable any counselor, with the click of a mouse, to make arrangements through any GDS. This replaces the need to learn the arcane commands of a particular GDS.

For the CWT system to succeed, however, it needed to link, or 'talk to,' the major GDSs. What's more, the link needed to be transparent to travel counselors.

To meet this need, SITA developed and applied the SITA Integration Platform software solution. This solution gives access to the major GDSs, airline and rail reservation hosts through a set of common APIs (application program interfaces).

SITA Integration Platform provides a seamless link between the newly created CWT system and the world's major reservation systems.

CWT's Adams said that the SITA Integration Platform software proved to be a critical element in his company's overall solution. Without it, CWT would have had to invest a tremendous number of resources to writing applications to connect to the major systems – such as Sabre, Worldspan and Apollo.

“SITA Integration Platform¹ acted as a bridge between our software and the big mainframes,” Adams said. “Now we have a single interface to the primary GDSs, which enables us to enhance our already high level of customer service. Travel counselors no longer have to have expert knowledge of a particular GDS. SITA Integration Platform gateway removes that barrier, allowing the counsellor to concentrate on customer service rather than keying in lengthy, difficult-to-learn commands.”

1 Formerly known as iTravelConnect.

Allowing SITA to take care of the host connections, data formats and associated maintenance ended up saving CWT both time and money.

In addition to incurring huge costs, creating and implementing the gateway with in-house personnel could have compromised the project schedule.

Another key benefit of SITA Integration Platform product is that both the GDS and the CWT applications can be upgraded independently without impacting each other.

CWT has seen results. The company has reduced the amount of time required to train an agent. Counselors can now make travel arrangements with the click of a mouse, and the chance of human keystroke errors is now reduced, since complex 'codes' are no longer manually entered into the system. As a result, CWT can report more accurate data back to its clients.

CWT also expects the call centres to yield significant improvement in productivity. Under the old model, travel counselors could only field corporate calls from certain clients, because they were trained in only one GDS. The CWT call centres of today enable any counsellor to field any call from any client, since no specialized GDS software knowledge is required. As a result, CWT gains more flexibility in how it allocates its human resources.



SITA

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