



Comair resolves logistical challenges with SITA's FleetWatch®

US airline Comair – a wholly-owned subsidiary of Delta Air Lines – has discovered how FleetWatch®, SITA's schedules management and operations control system, can pay for itself in improved logistical control.

Comair was founded in Cincinnati in 1977 by father-and-son team Raymond and David Mueller, providing links between their home base and the cities of Cleveland, Detroit and Akron-Canton. In 1981, the company went public and in 1984 became a Delta Connection carrier, later joining with Delta Air Lines in development of the Orlando hub in Florida.

Recognized as US Regional Airline of the Year in 1990 and again in 2000, Comair has grown strongly through its 26-year history, becoming a wholly-owned subsidiary of Delta in January 2000. By early 2003, it had an all-jet fleet of 128 aircraft, operating more than 830 daily flights to over 100 cities in the US and Canada, as well as to the Bahamas.

The success of Comair is due in large measure to the airline's passion for keeping its aircraft in the air, its administration minimized and its operational effectiveness maximized through well-tuned decision-making processes.

This commitment lay behind Comair's decision to purchase FleetWatch® from SITA (see detailed product description on page four). Rather than use the solution as a stand-alone product, the company decided to tie in FleetWatch® with its own existing internal processes, founded on a UNIX-based system interface with Delta.

"Rules are there to help, not hinder"

FleetWatch® reduces cost through improved aircraft use, better on-time performance and increased productivity. It does this by keeping track of an aircraft's progress, offering immediate response options to any disruption and helping the airline minimize its impact on planned schedules.

"When we decided to take FleetWatch®, we were reassessing many of our existing business practices," according to Dave Soaper, Comair Vice President – Safety, Security and System Operations. "By customizing our use of FleetWatch®, we recognized we could leverage the financial benefits.



Comair resolves unprecedented logistical challenges with SITA's FleetWatch®

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Dave Soaper, Comair Vice President Operations Control.

Fleetwatch® –
delivering improved
aircraft utilization
with less 'aircraft on
the ground' time.



This involved, among other things, building a rules database which would interface with other systems in use within the organization.

"We were particularly keen on the simulation and decision-support capabilities of FleetWatch®, which allow us to verify options on a virtual basis and then change a virtual, simulated response into reality at the press of a button. When we contracted to take FleetWatch®, little did we realize how valuable that capability was to prove."

Over a six month period in 2001, the airline faced disruption from a pilots' work stoppage, followed by complete temporary paralysis in the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington. FleetWatch® played a key role in the rapid resumption of airline operations.

The first test was significant disruption as a result of a prolonged pilots' strike in the first half of 2001.

"Thanks to our ability to use FleetWatch® to develop alternative scenarios in a matter of minutes rather than days, we could ramp down our service in readiness for the strike," continues Dave Soaper. "With consistent information also passed to our passengers, we were able to reduce the inconvenience to them – and keep them on-side when service resumed. It also meant that, once the strike was settled, our planes were where we needed them to optimize full resumption of service."

FleetWatch® has subsequently contributed to improved crew morale. Dave Soaper again: "Crew schedules have always involved an element of choice, according to the availability etc of individuals. When those schedules clash with an optimum operating environment, there is the potential for conflict. With rules built into the system, we now ensure that aircraft rotation follows pilot rotation. The result is a better motivated crew, happier passengers and improved labour relations. It's a win all round."

“There’s no doubt that FleetWatch® was a wise investment – and I’m clear that, once installed as a customized system, it paid for itself within six months.”

Reassembling the network

The shocking events of September 11 had an immediate impact on all airlines operating in US airspace, when a presidential order mandated every aircraft to land immediately at the nearest airport and forbade entry into US airspace of international flights.

“This was a completely unprecedented action,” recalls Dave Soaper. “Never had so many aircraft been stranded in locations which, as often as not, were not even on an individual airline’s schedule.”

“For Comair, as for every else, the ramp-down was immediate and chaotic. But we did have one advantage through FleetWatch®. We knew where every aircraft and every crew member was located at the moment the directive was given. That sounds obvious, but it’s not always the case for airlines without a system such as FleetWatch®.

“Where this system gave us the edge was the speed with which we could get our planes flying again. The grounding order lasted for three days. But at the outset we didn’t know how long it would last. So over that period, we used FleetWatch’s® scenario building capability two or three times a day. Using the previous scheduling system, there is no way we could have completed one scenario over the three-day period, let alone in less than a day.

We were also able to keep our pilots and attendants informed and ready for take-off. When clearance was finally given to resume operations, our complete network was rebuilt and in operation within hours.

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FleetWatch® is an integrated Schedules Management and Operations Control system providing graphical, dynamically updated and colour-coded representation of the flight schedule.

FleetWatch® – operations control and scheduled planning

FleetWatch® is an integrated Schedules Management and Operations Control system providing graphical, dynamically updated and colour-coded representation of the flight schedule. This 'in-house system' is tailored to each airline, and drives the creation and deployment of an optimal operating schedule. With effective on-the-day operations control tools, and rich functionality via a graphical user interface, the location and status of any aircraft or flight can be immediately portrayed. The same tools can be deployed to facilitate the effective and quick recovery from any operational disruption.

- Improved aircraft utilization with less 'aircraft on the ground' time.
- Minimized impact from delays using a range of responsive functions to restore on-time performance.
- Immediate status, assessment and recovery capability following any form or severity of disruption.
- Decision support capability provided by solution options based on the company's own business and operational practices.
- Immediate location information.
- Reasons for delays and subsequent impact on rest of the day's schedule detailed.
- 'What if' scenarios and outcomes portrayed.
- Decisions deployable across the operation through rich functionality enablement.
- All necessary information delivered for the right decision to be taken.



For further information,
please contact SITA Flight
Operations:

Sales Department

tel: +44 (0)20 8756 8058
fax: +44 (0)20 8756 8100

Marketing Director

tel: +44 (0)20 8756 8013
fax: +44 (0)20 8756 8100

e-mail: flightops@sita.aero

www.flightops.sita.aero

www.sita.aero

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