



Centralized data-processing solution
improves operations worldwide

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>> Association transforms members' operations by enhancing its own

International Air Transport Association

International Air Transport Association's (IATA's) aging Cargo Account Settlement System (CASS), running on outdated technologies and disparate platforms, was becoming increasingly difficult to manage and use. The association looked to EDS to enhance this system and move it to a centralized data-processing center.

IATA saved more than 50 percent on total CASS data processing and support activity costs by consolidating from the various mainframe and PC operations onto a single platform. In addition to the savings, we continue to provide the highest quality of service aligned with our members' needs.

Glyn Hughes
Director, Cargo Distribution
IATA

The business issue

IATA is a trade association that represents about 265 airlines, the flights of which comprise about 95 percent of the world's scheduled air traffic. Part of IATA's expansive mission is to ensure freight moves about the vast global airline network as smoothly and seamlessly as possible. But this is no simple task. In the past, for example, airlines and cargo agents – who collect freight charges from shippers on behalf of the carriers – exchanged volumes of paper-based invoices and reports. Multiple currencies, business processes and languages made this an error-prone and time-consuming challenge. To simplify this process, IATA developed CASS as an intermediary between the two parties.

Originally, CASS was designed to verify, consolidate and ensure payment of freight-related invoices and reports. Developed in COBOL in the '80s and '90s and installed on disparate platforms in multiple countries, CASS became increasingly inefficient and difficult to manage. With many different versions of the system in use worldwide, IATA had no central control of local development and little hardcopy documentation of work done. Plus, the association spent considerable resources training users at each site on how to operate the unwieldy, DOS-based system. Moreover, expanding CASS to new locations proved costly. As an organization committed to making its members as efficient and cost-effective as possible, IATA decided to transform its own operations. It turned to EDS for help.

Our approach

The EDS team began by creating a common and standardized environment, called the CASS Reference System (CRS), as a basis for all existing and future CASS operations. Then, IATA and EDS jointly investigated ways to integrate processing centers in multiple locations into one global processing center using one CRS software installation.



Methodology and technology

CASSLink has the following specifications:

EDS and Micro Focus used the Open ESQL Assistant in Micro Focus' Net*Express to modify the original COBOL business logic so that it could operate in a server environment using an Oracle relational database instead of index sequential files.

The interface to CASSLink environment is Web-enabled via Microsoft Visual Studio .NET

CASSLink architecture uses a three-tier model. Access to the data layer is available only through the application layer and defined functions.

Batch-based code was changed into COM+ components (DLL files). These files are now called from Microsoft's .NET applications.

Data is encrypted over the Internet using SSL 128-bit technology.

Services featured

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EDS then created a single global, secure and consolidated CASS operation called CASSLink. This Web-based solution allows the simultaneous deployment of enhancements to every CASS operation. It also enables online data input, processing and output, as well as easy integration between CASS, agent and airline legacy systems. Plus, CASSLink easily accommodates new applications development and facilitates improved documentation. In order to save the agency the time and money associated with redesigning business rules, the team reused IATA's existing business logic.

We also designed a secure, redundant hosting center in Rüsselsheim, Germany, to handle processing for all CASS operations worldwide. With CASSLink and the hosting facility ready for action, EDS began migrating current data from CASS sites to the central system, developing functionality for local specifics such as language requirements, currency issues and tax rules. We also linked agents and airlines to the solution and trained users.

The results

Currently operating in more than 40 countries and processing more than 1 million transactions monthly, CASSLink benefits IATA in a number of ways. To begin, streamlined processes make managing and improving the system fast and efficient. For example, IATA has the flexibility to manage CASSLink centrally or from any field office through its secure interface. And system enhancements and upgrades can be deployed more quickly since engineers do not have to implement them on disparate systems. As a result, IATA's data processing and support costs were reduced by half.

Meanwhile, standardized electronic invoicing processes significantly accelerate clerical tasks and reduce errors. Plus, cargo agents can pay one amount covering payment to all carriers, rather than the hundreds as before. Moreover, users find the system's intuitive, Web-based interface easy to learn and use.

Finally, IATA is able to expand its international presence much faster and easier than before. In fact, the agency plans to add 22 new countries to the system this year alone, whereas before it had been expanding by about one country per year. This rapid growth is made possible thanks not only to greater efficiencies, but also IATA's ability to cost-effectively deploy the solution to relatively smaller countries.