

Airline Seat Company takes off with Verastream Host Integrator

Expands flight offerings and improves online customer service



Airline Seat Company (ASC) offers travel services to destinations in Europe, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and the Far East. It manages a comprehensive range of travel needs including plane tickets, hotel and villa accommodations, car and motor home rentals, and cruises.

Determined to continually improve customer service and retain a competitive edge, ASC decided to revamp their travel systems. The project comprised two specific goals:

- **Expand ticket sales to include all major airlines.** Canada 3000 was the leading source of revenue for ASC. Other carriers were effectively shut out due to integration complexities.
- **Build a fully integrated self-service web site for customers.** Most of ASC's 60,000 annual reservations were being forced through the call center, because their various systems could not "talk" to each other.

ASC quickly realized it would not be easy to bring their plan to life. In fact, they had some major hurdles to overcome.

Problem #1: A Proprietary Reservation System

ASC's legacy reservation system, ATOP, made implementing the plan virtually impossible. Used by 50 percent of the industry's travel agents, ATOP is an online reservation, administration, and accounting system that runs on Digital VAX computers. At ASC, ATOP is linked to the following back-end systems:

QUICK VIEW

Problem

- Needed to expand flight offerings and improve customer service.

Solution

- Used Verastream Host Integrator to web-enable legacy reservation system.

Results

- 24x7 availability of online flight reservation system.
- Increased airline ticket sales.
- Tickets for scheduled flights found in 30 seconds (vs. the previous 20 minutes).
- More bookings, including customized bookings, via the web.
- Reduced training time and costs.

- The ASC banking system.
- The Canada 3000 reservation system.
- Galileo, a leading provider of electronic distribution services for the worldwide travel industry.
- FareSearch, an Anite product designed to hold contracts between ASC and the airlines.

The connection to Canada 3000's reservation system allowed ASC sales agents to directly reserve tickets on Canada 3000 flights. All other airlines were supposed to be booked through Galileo and FareSearch, but ATOP's interface to those systems was complex and rigid. "Sales agents were taking 15 to 25 minutes to book flights, and customers can't wait that long," said Thibault Baradat, IT manager at ASC. "We knew we needed to reduce that time to less than a minute."

Problem #2: No Real-Time Web Integration

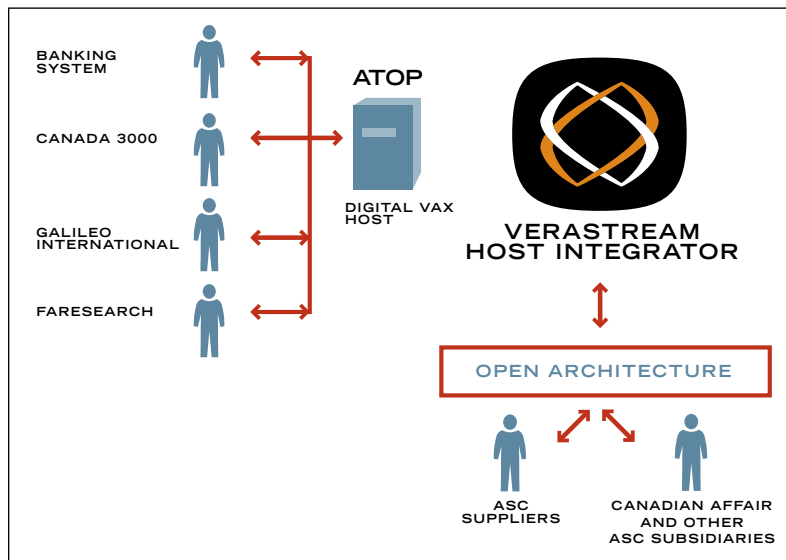
In addition to being complex and inflexible, ATOP was not integrated with ASC's web site. Every day, ASC staff used a web-based application to update flight prices and availability on the site. Even so, customers wanting the latest travel info had to call sales agents, who then accessed ATOP to retrieve and validate the required data. This meant that customers had to make their travel arrangements during business hours.

And online transactions were not much more streamlined. Here's what happened behind the scenes: Once a customer made a reservation online, the details were forwarded via PGP e-mail to sales agents who manually entered them into the ATOP system. Not only was this a time-consuming process, but valuable customer information was often lost along the way because ATOP did not provide a field for storing information such as e-mail addresses and first names.

Finding the Right Solution

The first solution ASC considered was a proprietary product manufactured by Anite, maker of ATOP. Commonly used by travel services, this product provided a front end for web applications. But it had numerous drawbacks:

- Since it was not built on open standards, customizing the system or integrating new technologies would be difficult. This approach could limit ASC's future flexibility and growth.
- Its non-component-based architecture required a one-time rollout. Baradat preferred a phased deployment that would minimize risk.



Verastream Host Integrator lets ASC's legacy reservation system communicate with the systems of suppliers and subsidiaries.



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- Customer information would be stored and controlled by Anite, making data analysis difficult for ASC.
- The Anite solution did not allow customized bookings online in real time.

Given these limitations, Baradat decided to search for an open-architecture solution that would give ASC the greatest flexibility.

Verastream: The Ticket to Success

After Attachmate did an on-site proof of concept, Baradat was convinced that Verastream Host Integrator was the right choice. Along with all the benefits of an open architecture, Verastream provides load-balancing support for easy scalability, making it a perfect fit for Baradat's future needs.

ASC used Verastream Host Integrator to build a graphical front end to replace the complex interface of the Galileo application. In addition to reducing training time and costs, it allows ASC to sell tickets for any airline. Equally important, sales agents can now find tickets for scheduled flights in about 30 seconds.

ASC also used WebObject support for Java to develop a web-based front end that provides the integration between ASC's portal service and ATOP. The new application, which uses the Verastream ESAPI interface, provides HTML to the Internet and XML to ASC partners.

With such a vast array of current information at their fingertips, ASC customers can now make and customize their travel plans online, in real time. And important customer information, received via the web and by phone, is now saved.

"Using Verastream Host Integrator, we can now give customers up-to-the-minute flight availability, pricing, and customization options via the web," concluded Baradat. "This is definitely a competitive advantage for us."