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# ascend

Taking your airline to new heights

A man in a dark pinstriped suit and tie is smiling and holding a small white model airplane. He is standing in front of a window with horizontal blinds. The background is slightly out of focus, showing the blinds and some light coming through.

## World's Happiest Airline

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Effectively diagnosing MRO issues and prescribing solutions



# Gate Manager

AirTran Airways leverages the new, powerful *Sabre® AirCentre™ Gate Manager*, a real-time flight monitoring and gate management decision-support solution that efficiently gates a flight schedule and helps pro-actively respond to irregular operations.

■ By Lauren Lovelady | *Ascend Staff*

While many airlines are still trying to recover from the economic downturn of the past couple of years, other carriers, particularly low-cost ones such as AirTran Airways, posted fourth-quarter and even yearly profits for 2009. In fact, AirTran Airways experienced a record full-year profit due in large part to its growing operations at Milwaukee, Wisconsin's Mitchell International Airport.

It's not surprising then that the airline made a major commitment to the Milwaukee area at the end of last year by announcing the establishment of a secondary hub at the airport, bringing with it additional jobs and pilot and flight attendant bases. AirTran Airways began flights to Milwaukee just seven years ago from its primary hub in Atlanta, Georgia, and is now the second-largest carrier operating there. Currently, it operates 52 departures a day from its new hub to 22 destinations.

"For each of the last three years, we have doubled the size of our presence in Milwaukee in terms of our flights, our employees and the numbers of markets served," said AirTran Airways Vice President Kevin Healy.

But growth does not come without growing pains. Like most other carriers, AirTran Airways has focused on cutting costs, generating ancillary service revenues, increasing capacity on profitable routes and trimming unprofitable ones, more efficiently utilizing resources, and improving processes. To assist with these

tasks, the carrier is teaming with *Sabre Airline Solutions*® to incorporate the latest technology into its operations.

Most recently, AirTran Airways served as the launch customer for the new *Sabre® AirCentre™ Gate Manager*, a real-time flight monitoring and "event-triggered" decision-support solution that helps ensure each aircraft is assigned a suitable airport gate to park at a designated time. Using data from an airline's flight operations system, *Gate Manager* evaluates the information, analyzes changing conditions, alerts users to potential problems — sometimes hours in advance — and automatically disseminates updated gate information, making it available to all dependent systems, including flight operations, airport FIDS and boarding pass printers. By proactively addressing potential issues, airlines can minimize operational disruptions and passenger and baggage displacement as well as reduce tarmac waiting times and taxi fuel burn for their aircraft.

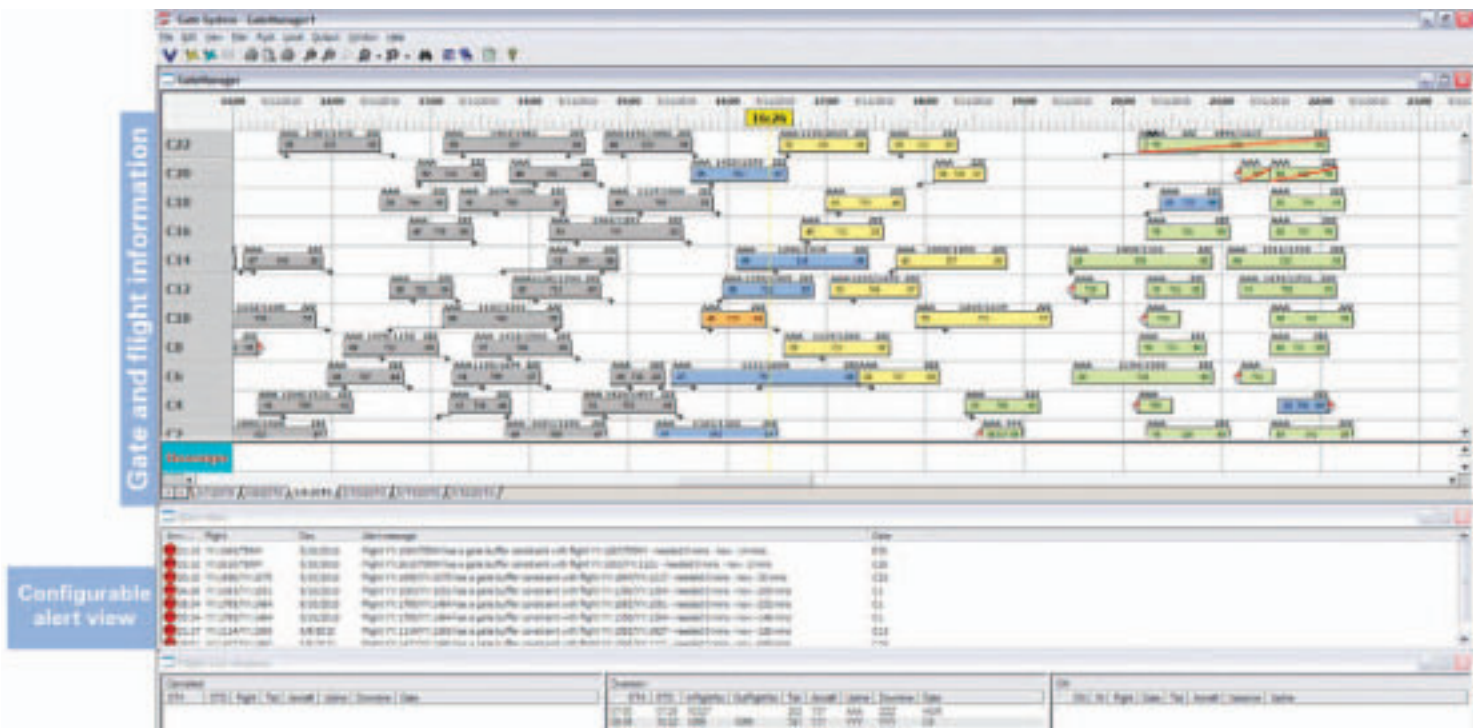
AirTran Airways implemented the new version of *Gate Manager* for a handful of key users at its Atlanta hub, which has approximately 280 daily departures. The airline was already utilizing a previous version of the solution at the hub. With the ongoing feedback provided by AirTran Airways, *Sabre Airline Solutions* continues to fine-tune the gate management technology for the airline's Atlanta hub. In the meantime, the carrier also recognized the need for an automated, real-time gate management solution at its expanding Milwaukee operation.

The new version of *Gate Manager* was installed there and is in full production, replacing the airline's manual processes in place until just a few months ago.

"It was a rewarding experience to provide input into the new version of *Gate Manager* and act as the launch customer," said Michael Bernardo, Atlanta Command Center manager for AirTran Airways. "The new and improved functionality captured in this version will enhance any carrier's ability to make time-sensitive decisions with broader knowledge of all the moving parts in a fast-paced hub operation."

The new *Gate Manager* — rebuilt from the ground up — provides AirTran Airways with advanced features that continue to evolve based on user feedback. A component of *Sabre® AirCentre™ Enterprise Operations*, *Gate Manager* is based on flexible, robust technology in an open, service-oriented architecture framework that leverages the *Sabre® ASxSM Airline Services Exchange*. Utilizing the ASx advanced platform, airlines can easily integrate *Sabre Airline Solutions* technology with other company systems or in-house or third-party applications and incorporate new components and replace outdated ones without major disruptions to infrastructures or operations. Reliable, scalable and secure, the ASx exchange is designed to evolve as airlines' needs and operations change in response to the dynamic marketplace as well as lower their IT development costs.

*Gate Manager* integrates with other components within *Sabre® AirCentre™ Airport*,



**Gate Manager** includes advanced graphical alert capabilities that immediately display the violation of a specific parameter. The alert offers alternatives so the impact to passengers and the overall operation is minimal.

including Sabre® AirCentre™ Staff Manager real-time resource management solution as well as other Sabre AirCentre Enterprise Operations components such as the Sabre® AirCentre™ Movement Control flight information system. Therefore, a gate change made in Gate Manager is automatically reflected in Staff Manager without manual input or intervention.

Based on customer feedback from users of the previous version, Gate Manager is now more flexible, reliable and user friendly. Flight information and gate assignments and changes that were once saved on each user's individual computer are now stored in a central database users connect to via a graphical user interface. This common repository enables users to view the same data at the same time. In addition, a variety of reports can be pulled from the database based on user-defined specifications to help identify trends as well as ongoing issues.

The gate management solution's expanded scrollable view of the flight schedule enables users to review operations up to four days in the past, the current day and up to three days in the future. By clicking on a tab, users can easily move among the days and assess past problems, manage current operations in real time and plan the days ahead.

In the previous version of Gate Manager, information was updated once every minute, and each user's computer "refreshed" on a different schedule. These inconsistencies made it difficult for even users seated next to each other to accurately assess information and coordinate changes. Rather than being "refresh-based," the new Gate Manager employs an XML push-notification method. Essentially, when a change

occurs — for instance an aircraft blocks in at a gate — the information is sent via message queuing, which signals the solution to automatically update. This enables a seamless flow of information with all users receiving the same data at the same time in a matter of seconds.

"Gate Manager allows us to communicate to users and view information once limited to phone or radio transmissions," Bernardo said. "Out, off, on and in aircraft gate events can be seen within seconds. Comments once only seen by the user can now be viewed by all participants."

Gate Manager now features four standard user access levels, with additional levels possible:

- Administrator level — Users can make changes to their airline's gate configuration, including adding and deleting gates, specifying which gates can accommodate various aircraft types, and determining which airlines can park at which gates. This level also oversees the work and access levels of other users.
- Supervisor level — Users perform the same functions as the administrator level; however, they cannot add or remove users or modify user access levels.
- Normal level — Operational changes can be made, but system configurations, such as adding or deleting gates, are not possible.
- Read-only level — Ground handlers, caterers and third-party contractors — those needing a snapshot of the airline's operation to effectively and efficiently support it — can access Gate Manager via this level, at which no changes are possible.

Fully customizable, Gate Manager can support most airlines' business models as well as airport authorities responsible for the management of gates. Following user-defined rules, the solution displays a graphical alert as soon as a specified parameter is violated and suggests alternatives for minimizing passenger and operational disruptions.

"I encourage all airlines using the old version of Gate Manager or evaluating a real-time gate management system to take the time and review this new version," said Bernardo. "It's a must-see application."

Ultimately, users are responsible for making final gate changes, but the Gate Manager solution's window into the future enables them to make an informed decision before the situation becomes critical. After all, one miscalculation or haphazard gate change can strain an airline both operationally and financially. ■

*For additional information about Gate Manager, please contact Brent O'Brien, a product manager for Sabre Airline Solutions. He can be contacted at [brent.o'brien@sabre.com](mailto:brent.o'brien@sabre.com).*

## +count it up

### 10.3

The percentage that passenger demand rose in March 2010 compared to March 2009, according to IATA. During the same period, cargo demand grew 28.1 percent. Both are improvements from the 9 percent and 26.3 percent growth for passenger and freight demand recorded in February.

### 1.7 billion

The amount in U.S. dollars airlines lost in just six days following the Iceland volcano, with the greatest impact on European carriers, according to IATA.

### 522 billion

The amount in U.S. dollars IATA expects industry revenues to reach this year. That's a US\$43 billion increase from last year, but still US\$42 billion below the 2008 peak.