

A MAGAZINE FOR AIRLINE EXECUTIVES

APRIL 2003

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A Conversation with ...

Brett Godfrey,  
CEO, Virgin Blue

## INSIDE

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De-Peaks Its Hub and  
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# Low Risk, High Reward

## *Conversion to New Reservations Systems Can be Accomplished With Minimum Disruption*

■ By Holly Cox | Ascend Contributor

Many airlines have realized cost control benefits and gained a competitive edge from outsourcing their reservations and departure control functionality. With more than 70 percent of worldwide passengers booked through a hosted reservations system, outsourcing continues to prove attractive to airlines of all sizes. But many airlines looking at outsourcing their reservations system or switching providers fear an unsuccessful system migration.

Airlines are justifiably concerned that an unsuccessful migration could result in diminished revenue from extended system downtimes, loss of data during the transfer of information and the negative impact on customer service. By selecting a reservations and departure control provider with extensive airline industry expertise and conversion experience, excellence in project organization and planning, a successful track record in orchestrating “knife-edge”

ID	Task Name	Duration	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	Month 4
1	Notional Project	72 days	[Gantt bar spanning Months 1-4]			
2	Contract Award	0 days	[Gantt bar at start of Month 1]			
3	Data Collector Meeting	2 days	[Gantt bar in Month 1]			
4	Partition Build	15 days	[Gantt bar in Month 1]			
5	Partition Population	20 days	[Gantt bar in Month 1]			
6	Training	35 days	[Gantt bar in Month 1]			
7	Communications	50 days	[Gantt bar in Month 1]			
8	PIR Conversion	50 days	[Gantt bar in Month 1]			
9	Cutover	5 days	[Gantt bar at end of Month 4]			
10	Close out	5 days	[Gantt bar at end of Month 4]			

Sabre Airline Solutions’ expertise in effective project organization and planning have given it leadership in large-scale system migrations.

“Reservations and departure control systems directly impact the customer and are at the core of an airline’s operations, integrated with virtually all other systems software,” said Gianni Marostica, president of airline reservations and departure control for Sabre Airline Solutions. “It is understandable for airlines to have some level of anxiety associated with such a huge endeavor. Although a very valid concern, the right partner can provide a low-risk, low-customer-impact conversion.”

cutovers, and proven post cutover support, an airline can avoid these potentially dangerous scenarios. “In addition to offering leading product capabilities, the vendor’s ability to provide an effective and efficient cutover experience

with as little operational disruption as possible should also be an extremely important consideration in the decision-making process for a supplier,” said Marostica.

### Experience is Key

Nothing compares to the value of deep airline industry expertise and extensive experience when it comes to system migrations. A vendor must first be able to understand the unique needs of the airline. The ability to effectively

“There is much to consider when selecting the right vendor to support both an industry-leading system and a successful cutover experience.”

scope the project comes from an extensive knowledge of airline operations and background in the aviation industry, which is demonstrated through proven migration methodologies successfully used repeatedly with airlines of all sizes and levels of complexity.

“It is true that every migration is, in fact, unique,” said Sharon Hall, vice-president of delivery for airline reservations and departure control for Sabre Airline Solutions. “What sets a vendor apart is its industry and conversion experience that allows it to quickly and effectively respond to issues if and when they arise. It is also necessary to consider the amount of dedicated personnel available — all of whom should have extensive experience working through virtually every possible scenario throughout the conversion process.”

### Having a Plan

Once the project has been appropriately scoped, a second key to a successful system migration is excellence in project organization and planning. Utilizing defined pre-migration methodologies with a series of “go/no-go”



checkpoints will keep an airline on track throughout the process. An airline's unique needs should be reflected throughout every stage of planning, organization and execution including training and subsequent support. During this phase, both the airline and the vendor should select a senior-level sponsor who is heavily involved throughout the migration process.

"Effective training and proven airline personnel change-management techniques are essential for solid planning and project management," Hall said. "Professional trainers skilled in airline migrations should work closely with the airline to analyze key processes and make recommendations to bridge gaps between business practices today and after the cutover."

An equally important element to effective planning is ensuring full technical capability prior to the cutover through business and data simulations. An experienced supplier will also offer extensive contingency planning and established risk management procedures as a part of its conversion practice to identify technical risks and describe fallback criteria and procedures in detail.

## A Cut Above

It is essential that a vendor be experienced in orchestrating a "knife-edge" conversion. In this approach, all systems cut over virtually simultaneously to minimize operations disruption and customer service impact. Doing this eliminates the need for repetitive systems synchronization as well as bridging software and other parallel support. This method also enables an airline to cut over quickly — within one to four hours of system downtime, depending in part on the airline's current system. In addition, data integrity will be maintained with no lost teletype traffic.

"A knife-edge conversion approach requires that the vendor have a deep

understanding of how the cutover will impact everyone involved, including airline personnel and customers," Hall said. "Maintaining high levels of customer service during the conversion should be the top priority."

This is accomplished by planning and implementing a comprehensive communications program to inform customers ahead of time, setting expectations and promoting the added features and benefits available to them once the new system is in place.

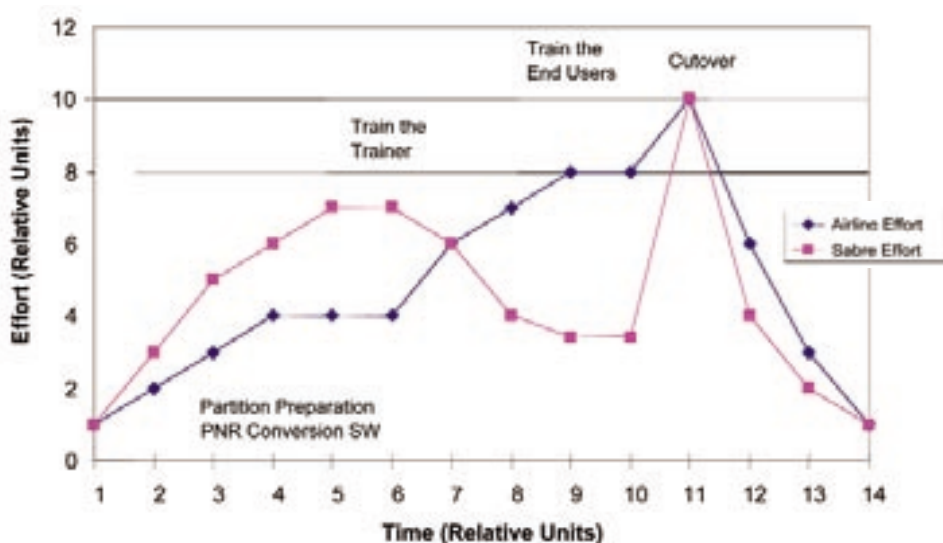
While a knife-edge conversion is recognized as an industry best practice, it is important that the vendor also be skilled in phased migrations, maintaining the flexibility to move to this strategy if the airline prefers this approach.

## In for the Long Haul

Finally, strong post cutover support is also a vital component to a successful

"The vendor's commitment to helping the airline stay competitive for the long term should be evident in these cutover-specific support initiatives," Hall said. "However, at a minimum, these initiatives should rest on the foundation of a strong customer-support model offering worldwide offices and a help desk staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week with an exceptional first-call response rate."

There are most certainly many additional elements with heavy influence on the success of a system migration. For instance, offering a single, easy-to-use graphical user interface with intuitive workflows for reservations and airport agents will substantially increase the ease of migration with less training needed and quicker internal adoption. Another element is the level of integration with back-end systems — will billing and loyalty systems, for instance, be fully integrated



Working together to prepare for a cutover to a new reservations system can make the process relatively seamless.

conversion. Ongoing personnel training and on-site support should be provided until the new system is operating smoothly. The vendor should be able to modify its support program to match the needs of the airline according to its level of experience and expertise.

with the new reservations system for continuity during and after the migration?

There is much to consider when selecting the right vendor to support both an industry-leading system and a successful cutover experience. *(continued on next page)*

Having successfully managed more than 30 cutovers since just 1998 — nine in 2002 alone — Sabre Airline Solutions has a proven track record of successful implementations and conversions. Its history includes successful implementations at Southwest Airlines, US Airways (the largest systems conversion in the history of the airline industry) and the former TWA (the largest systems conversion in a merger environment). Sabre Airline Solutions also converted four regional Australian airlines — Flight West, Skywest, Hazelton and Kendell airlines — in a rapid timeframe of 21 to 40 days rather than the typical 120 days.

“Flight West chose Sabre Airline Solutions’ reservations for several reasons, including the company they keep in other airlines — both in Australia and overseas,” said Scott

McMillan, managing director of Australia-based Flight West Airlines. “Further, Sabre Airline Solutions understood our requirements; our timeframe for migration was short, they were able to deliver the services required and most importantly, could demonstrate that delivery was possible.”

With more than 40 years of experience in the business, Sabre Airline Solutions, which manages the reservations and departure control functions for more than 70 airlines in 23 countries worldwide, offers proven reservations, departure and inventory control systems technology with unparalleled conversions knowledge, experience and methodologies. No other supplier has successfully managed the migration and implementation of air transportation systems with the scale and degree of complexity

that Sabre Airline Solutions has in hundreds of projects for airlines of all sizes. Continual improvement in software

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programming and hardware upgrades allows Sabre Airline Solutions to offer the fastest possible passenger name record conversion with the lowest number of PNR rejects in the industry. **E**  
*Holly Cox is marketing communications manager for Sabre Airline Reservations and Departure Control.*

## THE HIGH • LEVEL view

### News Briefs from Around the Globe

#### News from Sabre Airline Solutions

Sabre Airline Solutions was honored by The Airline Group of the International Federation of Operational Research Societies for its development of new resource planning capabilities for airlines. AGIFORS awarded Sabre Airline Solutions the prestigious “Best Technical Prize” for its development of the *Sabre® StaffPlan™* resource planning system, a new shift-scheduling model that helps airlines manage personnel scheduling at airports around the world. The offering is currently in use by 20 airlines globally.

At its annual symposium, AGIFORS recognizes top contributions in the development and application of decision-support technology to the airline industry. Any company or academic organization involved with decision-support systems in the airline industry is invited to attend and present its work. Sabre Airline Solutions’ contribution was recognized from a field of candidates that included American Airlines, Boeing, Continental Airlines, Delta Air Lines, Lufthansa and Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

“Our No. 1 commitment is to help our airline

customers better compete in today’s marketplace,” said Barry Smith, chief scientist and senior vice president of Sabre Research. “Not only does this award verify that we are working at the leading edge of decision-support technology, but also that the result of our work is translating into valued industry-leading products for the airline community worldwide.”

The mathematical optimization models powering the *StaffPlan* system are based on cutting-edge techniques of discrete mathematics. The *StaffPlan* system utilizes seven interlocking optimization models working together to solve complex shift-scheduling problems, delivering market-leading results in a matter of minutes.

The system evaluates trillions of possible solutions to find the best possible result, ensuring that airlines optimize their resource allocation and deployment. To do this, Sabre Airline Solutions accurately estimates work requirements, examines historical data looking for patterns in a variety of inputs including arrival times, and matches airline schedules with the desired customer service levels to provide robust and accurate work requirement estimates and scheduling solutions. **E**