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Supplier Connection

Sabre Holdings Web services brought the power of open standards to front-end connectivity in 2004. Now Sabre Holdings has developed similar new technology to improve the ability for travel suppliers, such as airlines, to distribute their content.

■ By Todd Richmond | *Ascend Contributor*

Anyone who has ever gone shopping knows it's all about content. If a merchant doesn't have what its consumers are looking for, they are less likely to return. Travel consumers are no different; if anything, they are becoming even more demanding with the continued surge in online shopping behavior.

Traditional travel content suppliers, such as airlines, hotels and car rental companies, are changing as well. They are moving toward more modern and open-technology standards for loading their data into systems such as SabreSonic™ Passenger Solutions and the Sabre® global distribution system. The newer protocols are easier to work with and require fewer development resources on the part of the airline's information technology staff to implement. In addition, these traditional suppliers have been joined by a host of new entrants including low-cost start-up airlines, rail carriers and cruise lines, all eager to have their travel products made available in Sabre Holdings' systems. As with the more traditional suppliers, these new players prefer modern Web-based connectivity standards, such as extensible markup language, or XML, that offer increased flexibility and reduced time to market.

Sabre Holdings' history of supplier connectivity spans several decades, with periodic advances meeting the needs of changing technologies over time. The solutions adopted have evolved from older network protocols and bandwidth to newer, widely accepted network implementations.

Following the era of the 1970s, prominent protocols in the airline industry were very proprietary in nature and highly specialized. These were often referred to in Société Internationale de Télécommunications Aéronautiques, or SITA, specifications such as P1024A and P1024B (wire-level protocols for mapping airline ticketing data to various host systems). First-generation supplier connectivity focused on these solutions. The world access complex, or WAC, environment continues to provide

solutions for some suppliers based on these protocols. Additionally, the WAC complex provided the basis for adopting newer standard network protocols emerging at the time. In the early 1980s, X.25 became a prominent standard and began to be accepted and implemented by many suppliers, driven by the need for increased performance and flexibility and the broad reach of the SITA network.

During the latter part of the '80s and into the early 1990s, suppliers began focusing on standard formats for exchanging data. EDIFACT initiatives and the work of governing bodies, such as Passenger and Airport Data Interchange and the International Air Transport Association, forged the way for normalized, well-accepted messaging.

Sabre Holdings invested heavily in a new supplier connectivity infrastructure — the host



Airlines, hotels, car rental agencies and other travel content suppliers are moving toward more advanced, open-technology standards for loading data into global distribution systems. Sabre Holdings' new supplier connectivity infrastructure provides a full product suite to help airline, travel agency, car and hotel partnerships better serve their customers.



Sabre Airline Solutions' archives

HIGHLIGHT

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ticketing, passenger through check in and passenger name record claim processing.

While HCC and CTS continue to provide a high level of service, the growth of the Internet combined with the ever-decreasing cost of Web hosting and network connectivity has created a desire for smaller suppliers to provide access to their content over the public Internet.

Today, newer channels of information are rapidly augmenting the traditional EDIFACT channels for supplier content. In addition to the high-volume, point-to-point connectivity provided by HCC and CTS, there is a need for lower-volume widely dispersed content access using newer Internet-standards-based formats for data exchange such as XML. XML exchanges are increasingly overtaking EDIFACT as the preferred means for data and function description as XML becomes the dominant form of electronic data exchange across all facets of IT including the transportation industry. The primary reason for this is the ease with which

XML interfaces can be developed and implemented compared to legacy protocols. One of the driving forces behind this change is the OpenTravel Alliance, a governing body, of which Sabre Holdings is a contributing member, charged with developing specifications for the use of XML throughout the travel industry.

Another force for change in supplier connectivity is the move toward distributed, open systems for core distribution and reservations services. These new platforms already power many of the components within the SabreSonic solutions and will eventually completely replace the mainframes that power the Sabre system. With this change comes increasing pressure to provide open interfaces to access supplier content. To address this need, Sabre Holdings has created the supplier side gateway, its latest technology investment in supplier access.

Tied into the IT company's integrated computing environment, supplier side gateway serves as an integration access point for open-

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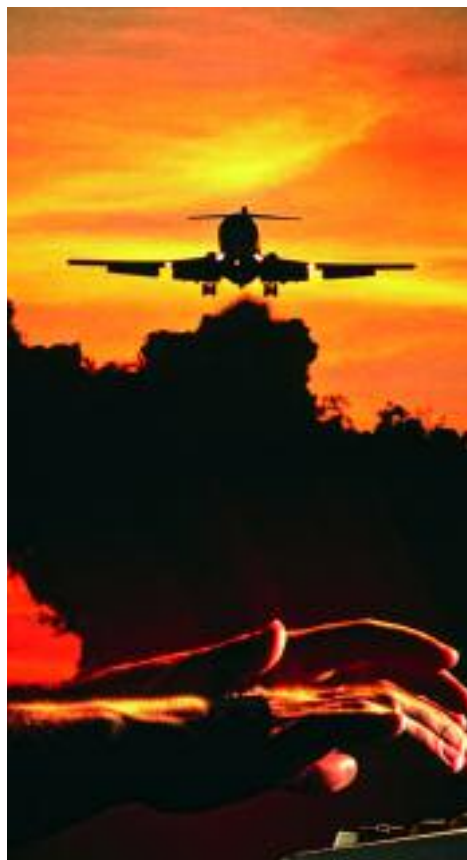


More advanced information channels are rapidly changing the traditional EDIFACT channels for supplier content. The supplier side gateway, Sabre Holdings' latest technology expenditure in supplier access, serves as an integration point for open-standards protocol access and provides the basis for both reservations and distribution applications to retrieve conventional content using modern configurations. The supplier side gateway also enables fresh content to be integrated at the point of sale, a concept that is becoming progressively more important to carriers as they move toward providing dynamically created travel packages to travelers using their Web sites.

standards protocol access. It will not only provide the basis for both reservations and distribution applications to access traditional content using new formats, but it also allows new types of content to be integrated at the point of sale, something that is becoming increasingly important to airlines as they move toward offering dynamically created travel packages to customers via their Web sites. Supplier side gateway will provide the infrastructure to enable this capability and facilitate the transformation to merchandising by providing the ability to apply filtering rules, transaction orchestration and messaging transformations at the connectivity layer along with buffering of supplier requirements for message formats and communication protocols.

Ultimately, supplier side gateway will enable Sabre Holdings to retire the legacy WAC complex while retaining HCC/CTS for EDIFACT connectivity as long as that is required. It will enable the company to invest the additional cost savings into additional enhancements of the supplier connectivity infrastructure. **E**

communications complex, or HCC — to support EDIFACT and launch a new generation of applications for real-time, direct-connect processing, such as availability and sell functions. Today, the HCC and its successor, the common translation service, provide a full product suite for travel agency traffic and airline, car and hotel partnerships alike. Product features include popular functions, such as electronic



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