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## SkyTeam:



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A Conversation With  
Leo van Wijk, Chairman,  
SkyTeam

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# The Game Changer

History was made in the world of flight planning as *Sabre Airline Solutions*<sup>®</sup> acquired Austria-based f:wz and incorporated its flight planning software and services into its enterprise operations business.

■ By Michael Hoppin | *Ascend* Contributor



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An average flight planning system simply isn't enough ... not for the world's most successful airlines. They need advanced flight planning technology to support one of the most important aspects of their business. And that's why it was critical for *Sabre Airline Solutions* to embark on a large investment project to ensure airlines around the world had access to leading flight planning solutions.

As part of the initiative, the technology company conducted a build-versus-buy analysis to determine the best approach to offering airlines an unmatched flight planning solution. The analysis indicated an acquisition was the best approach for the future of flight planning, and after an extensive search, f:wz presented a perfect match, offering a best-of-breed flight planning solution. In September, f:wz was acquired, and its solutions were incorporated into *Sabre® AirCentre™ Enterprise Operations*.

*Sabre Airlines Solutions* will leverage the strengths that both systems bring — its previous flight planning system along with the newly added technology — and continue investing in the combined system to offer the most powerful flight planning solution available in the industry. Through the acquisition, the company now offers a “connected” data service bureau offering to provide multiple levels of support services and outsourced flight planning services. It will continue to leverage the SaaS (Software-as-a-Service) model in combination with data and flight planning services to provide a cost-effective overall technology solution to its customers.

The f:wz solution has been renamed *Sabre® AirCentre™ Flight Plan Manager* and has a solid, forward-thinking reputation in the industry as one of the first flight planning systems to offer four-dimensional cost optimization. This means route, altitude, speed and time are all analyzed simultaneously against fixed operating and over-flight costs to produce flight plans that are less costly on a flight-by-flight basis. f:wz has been successful in marketing this capability and set a new theme in the industry regarding the value of this new-generation flight planning system.

“f:wz is an outstanding company that has set new, innovative standards in cost reduction and fuel optimization within the flight planning industry,” said Steve Clampett, president of airline products and services for *Sabre Airline Solutions*. “We already offer airlines some of the best-in-class flight planning tools, so as we integrate f:wz’s offerings into our portfolio, we will have flight planning solutions and services that are second to none.

“f:wz has established a very solid reputation in the industry as a flight planning market leader,” he said. “United Airlines selected f:wz as its mainframe replacement flight planning solution a few years ago, and now, f:wz

## High Flight

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has the opportunity to support the combined United/Continental merger. It is impressive that a large carrier such as United has selected a small entrepreneurial company like f:wz, and now United has *Sabre Airline Solutions* behind it to provide a new foundation for growth as it becomes the largest airline in the world with the Continental merger.”

A relatively small company of 60 employees based in Vienna, Austria, f:wz was a fairly new player to the flight planning industry, having entered the ring in 1987. It was founded

by Capt. Raimund Zopp, Capt. Gregor Resch, Peter Radler and Christoph Prinz, who were quickly considered innovation leaders. They built a strong customer base of more than 20 airlines with operations around the globe. They continued to set the standard for flight plan cost efficiency, building on the collective talents of an employee group with real-world airline experience.

The benefits for airlines around the world come from combining *Sabre Airline Solutions’* large customer base and the industry’s most capable and comprehensive enterprise operations portfolio of products and services with one of the industry’s premier flight planning products.

As a result, airlines have access to unmatched flight planning technology in addition to *Sabre Airline Solutions’* industry-leading crew management and crew services, flight operations and tracking, and airport resource planning and management products and services.

The incorporation of f:wz’s technology and services into the *Sabre AirCentre Enterprise Operations* portfolio has been described as “game changing” by current and prospective customers alike.

Several global carriers support the value of the acquisition, including:

### Virgin Atlantic Airways

“Virgin Atlantic Airways considered the acquisition a very positive move for f:wz and *Sabre Airline Solutions* and looks forward to the ongoing support of *Sabre* in Virgin Atlantic Airways’ operations. We, along with



Photo: Hawaiian Airlines

**Strategic Move** Hawaiian Airlines supports the combining of f:wz technology with *Sabre Airline Solutions*.

our subsidiaries such as Virgin America, need to consider a common vendor going forward for our operational solutions.”

— David Kistruck, general manager of flight operations

### Hawaiian Airlines

“The acquisition of f:wz by Sabre was a nice move and should work out well.”

— Marc Kup, senior director of flight operations engineering

### United Airlines

United is currently an f:wz customer. Based on a recent conversation with Sabre Airline Solutions, the airline is excited about the

overall value Sabre will bring to its operation with the integration of Flight Plan Manager to Sabre® AirCentre™ Flight Explorer. Sabre can now combine Flight Plan Manager with its other solutions to provide United Airlines with technology that can scale and support the largest airline in the world.

Sabre Airline Solutions also received supportive comments from Air India, Atlas, Iberia and Turkish as these existing customers look forward to what Sabre and f:wz together can bring to the aviation industry.

Unique features, functions and services within Flight Plan Manager include:

- Variable cost optimization — The tool’s distinctive route-selection algorithms are

able to resolve all operational cost factors simultaneously to calculate an optimized four-dimensional flight path. All cost factors are taken into account by the algorithms to resolve the lowest-cost arrival time that meets specific mission requirements at the lowest possible fuel burn.

- Multi-routing comparison — The system provides functionality that allows for multiple routing permutations and combinations to be calculated for any flight using upper-wind data and aircraft performance. The optimal vertical and horizontal profile is determined on a flight-by-flight basis, taking advantage of airways and direct routing, accounting for FIR fee impact, and complying with restrictions and FAR or JAR OPS 1.255 requirements and customer policy. Results are ranked by cost, allowing decision makers to choose the lowest-cost options when solving complex operational flight planning problems.
- Delay cost management — These capabilities integrate a cost model for flight delays as a non-linear time-cost input to the flight profile optimizer, enabling an airline analyst to apply complete mission management to all flight operations.
- Auto optimization — This feature allows the system to be set to control all flight plan calculations and to run them automatically based on time or other event triggers. It significantly reduces dispatcher workload in the preparation of flight plan calculations.
- NOTAM management — This is available as a stand-alone NOTAM management system or as an integrated component. This service provides for the management and distribution of all state system (Class I) NOTAMs plus tools for creating and publishing internal company NOTAMs.

Acquiring f:wz is much more than just bringing in another solution to fill a gap.

“The acquisition is game changing because it takes a world-class software tool and places it inside an organization that has adopted world-class delivery and support models,” said Greg Gilchrist, senior vice president of global sales for Sabre Airline Solutions. “It catapults our Sabre AirCentre conversations into large SOC projects that span many of the key business functions across an airline’s operations.” **F**

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Photos: Shutterstock



**Overwhelming Support** United Airlines and Virgin Atlantic Airways both view the acquisition of f:wz by Sabre Airline Solutions to be a positive move for the airline industry.