IBM

Air Canada passengers check in faster with IBM self-service kiosk.

Overview

■ **Application**
 CRM and B2C self-service kiosk for airline passengers

■ **Business Benefits**
 80% reduction in check-in time; 50% customer usage during peak periods; increased productivity and customer satisfaction

■ **Software**
 IBM MQSeries®, Version 5.0; IBM Kiosk Manager; IBM Consumer Device Services; IBM Transaction Processing Facility (TPF); Tivoli® software

■ **Servers**
 IBM RS/6000®

■ **Services**
 IBM Global Services

Online reservations, express check-in and wireless information services keep Air Canada at the forefront of the air travel industry.

People are busier than ever—making customer self-service applications a popular commodity. From bank ATM machines to gas pumps that accept credit cards, consumers are finding more and more ways to manage routine tasks themselves. And companies are embracing the self-service model because it reduces their cost of doing business. This philosophy is spreading quickly in the airline industry, where record numbers of travelers are pushing older business processes beyond capacity—making good service difficult to provide.

"MQSeries and the other IBM software have enabled us to integrate our kiosk solution with our existing infrastructure, while maintaining operational reliability and without impacting our performance."

— Chris Quintal, Manager, Business Systems Strategy and Innovation, Air Canada

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Air Canada's Express Check-in kiosk solution received several prestigious IT industry awards from the Canadian Information Productivity Awards (CIPA) program and CIO Canada magazine.

"Customer service is the differentiator in this industry. A recent survey showed that 93 percent of our passengers say the kiosks have improved the flight experience—the IBM kiosk solution has proven itself over and over."

–Yvan Corriveau, Program Director, Air Canada

Air Canada, Canada's biggest airline, knows that today's travelers aren't locked into any one airline, and bad travel experiences can quickly lead them to other carriers. Based in Quebec, Air Canada serves more than 30 million passengers a year and is widely recognized by major travel organizations for its stellar customer service.

While it was pleased with its growing passenger base, the airline was concerned that its customer service systems might not be able to keep up. So, when a major customer survey revealed a need to improve the overall passenger experience, Air Canada looked to innovative e-business technology—in the form of self-service kiosks—to revamp the airline's business processes.

To deliver significant long-term benefits, the kiosks needed to match or exceed the existing level of agent-provided service in a format that was attractive and very easy to use. A major step toward achieving this goal was the integration of the kiosk frontend with Air Canada's existing IBM Transaction Processing Facility (TPF) flight reservation and departure control system applications.

Looking for a solid e-business leader

After reviewing e-business solutions from ten different vendors, Air Canada chose IBM because of its proven knowledge in implementing kiosk solutions, experience integrating e-business technology with TPF infrastructure and its ability to offer a complete solution—from hardware to software and services.

Working with IBM Global Services in Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal, Air Canada now has 142 kiosks across 8 airports in Canada where passengers can check in, change their seat, request a seat for an earlier flight departure and perform various other functions—without ever interacting with a service representative.

The solution is powered by IBM MQSeries, IBM Kiosk Manager and IBM Consumer Device Services on a Microsoft® Windows NT® server. An IBM RS/6000 server acts as a gateway between the kiosk server and the TPF applications.

Results have been impressive. Up to 50 percent of Air Canada's passengers are using the kiosks during peak periods, enjoying an 80 percent reduction in check-in time. And, employees are more productive in other areas, which helps cut operational costs.

"Cost reduction was only a fraction of our motivation," says Yvan Corriveau, program director, Air Canada. "Customer service is the differentiator in this industry. A recent survey showed that 93 percent of our passengers say the kiosks have improved the flight experience—the IBM kiosk solution has proven itself over and over."

IBM kiosk components lend convenience, reliability
Air Canada had already delved into e-business when, with IBM, it developed Canada's first online reservation and electronic ticket system in the mid-1990s. The system was part of the airline's global strategy to develop new, customer-focused business processes using Internet technology. With the kiosks, Air Canada has taken another step in the implementation of this strategy, becoming the first airline in Canada to introduce self-service kiosks.

The kiosks allow Air Canada passengers to use an accepted frequent flyer or credit card (and, in the future, other means of identification) to perform the same transactions they would at the check-in counter. After identifying the passenger, the kiosk requests the passenger's profile from the TPF system. Customer profiles are created within this system when passengers reserve flights or purchase tickets.

Next, the transaction is routed to the Windows NT server, where IBM Kiosk Transaction Server powers the business logic that contains all presentation and task instructions. The request is then passed through to the RS/6000 MQSeries gateway server, where a program written by IBM Global Services translates the request from Internet Protocol to the native mainframe protocol. "With its asynchronous messaging, MQSeries ensures the delivery of all the requests to the gateway server," explains Michel Claes, a systems architect and solution integrator who helped design the architecture for the Air Canada kiosk application. "It really is best-of-class when it comes to messaging and middleware."

Chris Quintal, Air Canada manager of business systems strategy and innovation, points out the value the IBM software brings to the airline's IT environment: "MQSeries and the other IBM software have enabled us to integrate our kiosk solution with our existing infrastructure, while maintaining operational reliability and without impacting our performance."

"Our passengers are our business, and IBM has played a pivotal role in helping us make their flying experience more pleasant."

–Yvan Corriveau

Self-service kiosks such as those used by Air Canada help make travelers' check-in experiences more efficient, so they don't need to rush to the check-in line.

Air Canada maximizes the availability of the kiosk system by using IBM Kiosk Manager to monitor the kiosks in realtime. If there is a problem, Kiosk Manager can page a local technician to resolve the problem onsite. Alternatively, it can alert a dispatcher, who can locate the appropriate technician.

Extending outward to wireless markets
Air Canada developed its kiosk application with future expansion in mind. Soon, agents will be able to use a variety of communication technologies—including wireless devices—to access the same platform developed for the kiosks. "IBM helped us construct an open solution that allows us to develop new functionality quickly," says Claes. "The wireless capability shouldn't take more than three months to implement."

The airline also plans to install Tivoli Self-Service Terminal Manager to dramatically decrease the administrative overhead of the kiosk system. Using Tivoli Software Distribution, future applications can be automatically rolled out across the network, eliminating the need for manual installation—and further decreasing development time. Air Canada already uses Tivoli Distributed Monitoring in conjunction with IBM Kiosk Manager to monitor potential system failures and provide automatic alerts to IT personnel should any issues arise.

As kiosks become an increasingly popular customer service channel in the air travel industry, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) is driving the development of a kiosk standard called Common Use Self Service (CUSS). By adapting their self-service applications to the CUSS standard, airlines will be able to run them on shared kiosks. This will reduce the cost of deployment for each airline and give passengers more conveniently located kiosks to choose from. IBM will help Air Canada update its kiosk platform to CUSS, enabling the self-service application to run on either CUSS or Air Canada kiosks.

All these initiatives will help travelers find more time to relax before take-off—and this will likely result in repeat business for Air Canada. The kiosk solution has garnered numerous awards for its innovation. Says Corriveau, "Our passengers are our business, and IBM has played a pivotal role in helping us make their flying experience more pleasant."

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