

Case Study

TECHSYS helps improve employee communications and processes with new employee portal

Employee Portal

Services featured

- Visioning
- Project Management
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- Mentoring and Training

Technology

- Rational Rose
- Use Case
- J2EE
- Servlets
- EJB
- Websphere
- JSP
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- Java

This innovative airline recognized the need for their frontline employees, pilots and flight attendants to gain dependable and ubiquitous access to communications and essential applications. TECHSYS provided the architectural vision; implementation skill set and project management to achieve this objective within an accelerated implementation timeline severely tested by the events of September 11th, 2001. Today, pilots and flight attendants enjoy dependable secured internet access to over ten different applications in addition to e-mail, departmental news, corporate news and operational news all available from a personalizable, easy to use employee portal. This same infrastructure has now been utilized to extend employee portal access to all employees within this company.

The business issue

This airline flies more than 90 million passengers a year to over 60 cities across the country, and they do it more than 3,000 times a day. While achieving this level of growth it has also proven its devotion to its employee experience exemplified by its frequent ranking as one of the top five "Best Companies to Work for in America".

True to its emphasis on employee experience, the client recognized early the need for pilots and flight attendants to access essential applications from home. This capability was provided through a private CompuServe network. Connectivity was slow and limited to a small number of concurrent connections. Access was achieved by loading client software on the accessing computer. A limited number of applications could be accessed and CompuServe charges were high for the service level provided. Problem resolutions required interfacing with CompuServe and the resulting level of satisfaction was not at the level desirable for Southwest.

What the airline needed was a solution that would provide 24/7 internet connectivity, faster access, higher reliability, in-house supportability, increased security and a broader range of offered services such as e-mail, personalized news content and application access. Due to TECHSYS' role in the successful and cost effective implementation of previous systems at the client, the company engaged TECHSYS in all aspects of the solution.

Employee Portal

TECHSYS provided a solution yielding faster, more secured and reliable access to essential applications for key employees whose jobs place them away from the office and home. Today the infrastructure associated with this solution has been extended to improve communications and application access for all employees.

“The Employee Portal system played a strategic role in our ability to communicate with the pilots and flight attendants during 9/11”

CEO

Our approach

The first step in assisting the airline was to identify the reasonable expectations and gain written acceptance from the representatives of the pilots and flight attendants. This involved helping to capture and define the business requirements and analyze the current business processes associated with existing operations as well as newly desired features. Use Case diagrams and documents were developed during this stage. Also included in this stage was the architecture and development of an infrastructure that would support the vision and the detailed requirements. A J2EE architecture approach was chosen with Websphere, Microsoft Citrix Services and Novell NIMS (web based e-mail) as the large scale building blocks to assist within this architecture. TECHSYS designed and implemented the infrastructure and connectivity for the Crew Portal based upon an extremely tight business designated timeline. This involved database design and development, presentation layer development including JSP's, HTML, and JavaScript, implementing the process flow and business rules by creating EJB's and Servlets, and creating test plans to verify the implementations. TECHSYS' expertise was transferred to Southwest Airlines employees throughout the project through formalized training classes and one-on-one mentoring.

Now, pilots and crew members only need a web browser to gain speedy and dependable access to essential applications, e-mail and personalized news.

The results

The staged implementation of the Employee Portal system was unexpectedly and severely tested during the week of September 11th, 2001. Scalability requirements had never envisioned that all pilots and crew members would be on the ground and needing system access during the same period of time. Due to the architecture proposed and implemented by TECHSYS, additional computers were quickly added to the cluster of web, application servers and Citrix servers providing the uninterrupted 24/7 uptime essential for communications during this timeframe. Today the architecture has been expanded to include an employee portal for all employees as well as the addition of countless applications.

