

Star Alliance launches starnet to further improve customer service

LOS ANGELES, September 28, 2000 – The member airlines of Star Alliance, the airline network for earth, has launched StarNet – a sophisticated IT solution that links the computer systems of all 15 airlines. StarNet will permit member airlines to share a wide range of information and thereby serve passengers even more effectively.

Using StarNet, employees at one Star Alliance member airline will have on-line, real-time access to systems operated by other partner airlines, allowing them to handle more complex business transactions and provide seamless service to their customers. For example, a ground agent with any Star Alliance airline will have up-to-the-minute information on the status of another member's flights – being able to advise of delays or gate changes instantly, without having to send the passenger to the other airline's counter. StarNet will, in effect, "translate" the information in one airline's computers and display it on the terminal of another. The network will handle information from a broad range of systems, including flight status, reservations and frequent flyer plans.

Designing a tool set that would allow the literally dozens of different systems created over time by the various airlines to talk to one another was the major challenge presented to the Star Alliance Information Technology team when it was formed last year. The Star Alliance IT team, which is headquartered in Los Angeles and includes staff hired from member airlines as well as industry experts, has led the development of an innovative solution that is simple, relatively inexpensive, yet delivers all the functionality needed for today's requirements – and tomorrow's.

Star Alliance Vice President and Chief Information Officer Tim Moore says StarNet acts like an Internet portal. "The information request from one airline enters StarNet through a gateway," says Moore, "and the software we created then translates the request into a common 'language' and sends it on through another gateway to the other airline. The reply comes back the same way."

The advantage, says Moore, is that the individual member airlines can retain their existing systems, which are well established, highly customized, and difficult to replace. "By contrast," he says, "if we had decided as a group to switch to a single system, it would have taken us five to ten years, and the conversion costs for 15 airlines would have been in the billions of dollars. By contrast, implementing StarNet cost us well under \$100 million."

With StarNet, airline employees can use the same screens with which they are already familiar "which means training costs are minimal," says Moore.

"StarNet is there to enable us to deliver better customer service," says Moore, "and to do that we need to be able to serve customers however they choose in person, by fax or phone, or via the Internet. StarNet gives us that flexibility."

"It also helps the Star Alliance network sustain its competitive advantage over other airline alliances, and opens the door to new levels of member cooperation for the customer's benefit," he adds.

The prime contractor for StarNet is Lufthansa systems, while Eland Technologies of Dublin, Ireland is developing the system software. Both companies won the assignments in an open competition with many of the world's leading IT suppliers.

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