

Air Canada

Soars Above the Competition With Web-Based Flight-Tracking Application

WebFOCUS Active Reports Technology Puts Customers in Charge of Their Data.

With offices spanning the globe, a fleet of jets crisscrossing the stratosphere, and tens of thousands of employees worldwide, Air Canada is a major international airline with a stellar reputation in the global marketplace. Not only is the full-service airline the largest in Canada, but it also provides the greatest number of scheduled passenger services in the Canadian market, in the U.S.-Canada exchange market, and for international flights to and from Canada.

Air Canada constantly seeks to improve corporate efficiency and employee morale by supplying unique services to its customers. To maintain the company's high standards throughout its worldwide enterprise, the airline purchased Information Builders WebFOCUS business intelligence (BI) software to enhance both internal and external reporting activities.

According to Chantal Berthiaume, Air Canada's director of network optimization, the initial motivation for acquiring this industry-leading business intelligence solution was to make it easier to access massive databases of information in a versatile, straightforward way.

Air Canada's first WebFOCUS project involved replacing a legacy revenue management reporting system that ran on the mainframe. The new revenue management system has been key to managing the business ever since September 11, 2001, when the airline industry went into crisis.

Snapshot

Organization

Air Canada is the world's 14th-largest commercial airline and the largest airline in Canada.

Challenge

Make it easier for consumers and corporate customers to purchase, book, and manage travel, as well as track all associated expenses through a self-service reporting portal.

Strategy

Use WebFOCUS Active Reports to create an online reporting environment that features up-to-date, 24 x 7 access to flight bookings and Corporate Pass usage history.

Results

Extending powerful BI capabilities to premier customers has helped generate sales, improve customer satisfaction, and solidify relationships. Two developers created the innovative BI application in only a few weeks at an extremely low cost – generating a tremendous return on a minimal investment.

Information Builders Solution

WebFOCUS

"We delivered an innovative BI application in only a few weeks at an extremely low cost, proving that BI does not have to be an expensive or complex endeavor."

Chantal Berthiaume
Director of Network Optimization
Air Canada



“WebFOCUS helped Air Canada understand which areas to focus on, and it played a key role in devising a more resilient business model going forward,” says Berthiaume.

Air Canada also used WebFOCUS to create a BI application that helps the maintenance staff identify deviations. In airline parlance, deviations refer to aircraft maintenance issues, including tracking parts for repairs. Maintenance personnel use WebFOCUS to list all the deviations requiring attention. They can generate standard or parameterized reports that list the type, location, and destination of each affected airplane, along with a catalog of available parts. WebFOCUS makes it easy to identify the required parts and

track the performance of each maintenance crew, such as their success identifying, classifying, and closing deviations.

Delivering First-Class Information to Customers

When the opportunity arose for the airline to extend powerful BI capabilities to its premier customers, once again WebFOCUS landed in the captain’s seat.

The journey began in early 2006 when Air Canada introduced its Corporate Pass program to selected large corporations on a negotiated basis. Corporate customers who frequently fly their employees on Air Canada flights use the Corporate Pass system to earn credits for certain amounts of travel.

They can then divvy up the credits among their various departments. Each Corporate Pass can be used by up to 300 employees to book travel within various geographic zones. As part of the accompanying management tools, Air Canada wanted to make it easy for customers to book, manage, and track their flights and flight expenses, as well as to view and analyze their travel data.



Air Canada’s IT department faced the difficult task of building an online reporting environment that could supply this information. It had to be simple enough for customers to use, yet sophisticated enough to handle sensitive corporate data in a secure, reliable way. “Our managers wanted to find deals for corporate customers, but they didn’t have the right reporting tools for the job,” says Berthiaume. “We had already proven that WebFOCUS is effective internally, so I suggested that we leverage our existing software assets and expertise for this application as well.”

Flying High in Corporate-Friendly Skies

Two developers in the commercial BI group went to work on the external reporting system. It was a quick success: the two employees developed the entire application in one month. The total cost was \$25,000.

“Some people were skeptical about our taking on such an important project outside of the usual IT channels,” admits Berthiaume. “In the end, we not only succeeded; we delivered more than our sponsors expected.” WebFOCUS allowed them to leverage Air Canada’s existing security infrastructure, databases, and server platforms, which accelerated the development

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process and reduced costs. “We delivered an innovative BI application in only a few weeks at an extremely low cost, proving that BI does not have to be an expensive or complex endeavor,” Berthiaume adds.

After obtaining positive feedback from a small group of beta customers, the developers made a few modifications, then began rolling out the software to Corporate Pass users. The application is now available to all Corporate Pass customers. Many of them use the embedded BI tools to manage their travel information, which makes the service more useful and compelling.



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“Through a simple Web browser, our customers can access their travel data offline and drill down to certain categories within the system, such as types of travel, geography, time of day, date, and many other variables,” explains Berthiaume. “Many BI providers supply reports to external customers, but very few supply true BI capabilities like WebFOCUS.”

The key to this flexibility is a unique BI technology called WebFOCUS Active Reports that combines data and interactive controls into a single, self-contained HTML file that can be sent by e-mail. By integrating these BI capabilities into the Corporate Pass application, Air Canada has enabled corporations to manipulate their travel data in a variety of ways. For example, travel managers can determine how much travel was allocated to particular projects, departments, and employees. They

can select certain types of travel and qualify data according to geography, time of day, and many other variables. The Active Reports technology also lets them manipulate reports in various sort orders, filter data by their chosen criteria, and chart information for visual impact.

Eye on the Horizon with Innovative BI Practices

According to Berthiaume, Corporate Pass gives Air Canada a competitive edge in the corporate travel market. “The ROI for this application is huge,” she says. “The system has helped generate sales, improve customer satisfaction, and solidify relationships with some of our key corporate customers.”

Customers such as TELUS love the flexibility. Instead of relying solely on travel agencies or global distribution systems like Sabre, this Canadian telecommunications firm now enjoys real-time access to its travel data through a corporate reporting portal. TELUS has been able to achieve significant cost savings with the implementation of flight passes as a corporate standard. “Air Canada’s robust self-service reporting interface allows us to extract and analyze our travel pass activity, providing us with the information we need to actively manage our air travel program,” reports Geoff de Bruijn, director, Strategic Planning and Logistics Support, TELUS Enterprise Services.

Thanks to testimonials like these, Air Canada has been recognized by the industry as a leader in how it designs and markets products and services. Extending management tools to its customers is a prime example of that innovation. From a larger perspective, it is indicative of a growing trend in BI circles: the willingness to extend actionable BI functionality to customers, business partners, and other external stakeholders. WebFOCUS makes it possible.



“It is only recently that technical breakthroughs such as WebFOCUS Active Reports have enabled companies such as ours to securely deliver BI functionality outside of the firewall,” says Berthiaume. “WebFOCUS has the software capabilities that our customers value – flexibility, ease of use, and a lightweight deployment footprint.”

