

Who Makes Progress™ in Travel

180,000,000
pounds in annual revenue
900,000
customers served annually
91,600
daily page views for web site
reservation system
14,279
daily visitors to the web site
72
percent of all trade bookings
made via the web site
65
percent of all Holiday Autos UK
bookings made via the web site
1
online market share position
0
DBAs

Holiday Autos Group, Ltd.



Clive Jacobs, Chairman and CEO Holiday Autos Group, Ltd.

Progress®-based Solution for Travel

Problem

Holiday Autos wanted to shift business focus and increase its online reservations, reduce costs, improve trading opportunities with many travel partners via an embedded web solution and deliver superior customer service.

Decision

Holiday Autos decided to develop a browser-based, flexible, robust online booking system to support direct customers, travel trading partners and telesales that was cost-effective and scalable.

Solution

Progress OpenEdge development tools, Progress WebSpeed and Sonic MQ combined capabilities to deliver an industry leading, XML-based online system to support customer reservations and trading partner bookings.

Result

Holiday Autos has shifted the balance of its bookings to its online reservation system, improved its partner relationships and business opportunities, reduced costs and improved profit margins.

Progress®-based Online Reservation System Drives B2B and B2C Success at Holiday Autos

Holiday Autos is always looking for the next opportunity. Innovation is at the heart of the company's culture, and its recent acquisition by lastminute.com should be the precursor of another era of synergistic growth. It is therefore not surprising that in Europe, Holiday Autos was amongst the first of the 'traditional' companies to embrace e-commerce. Today e-commerce sites transact Holiday Autos business in many countries including UK, Germany, France, Italy, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, Switzerland, the Nordic countries, Australia, South Africa and more. The latest technology enhancement is an XML (eXtensible Markup Language) solution that supports all affiliate partners.

When the Holiday Autos web site for car rental bookings hit the airwaves in December 1999, the company had very clear objectives for technology to enable more online business with partners and intermediaries in order to significantly increase profitability over the next three years.

The web was seen as the primary channel to this online marketplace and Holiday Autos gained early success. Today web bookings generate a multi-million pound business with revenues up month on month representing up to 65% of overall daily bookings taken in the UK. The company has been voted 'Best Car Rental Company' for the last several years and is now receiving Travel industry accolades for the quality and ease of use of the web site.

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Marketing may have created the business strategy but, in this instance, IT delivered the business opportunity. And so it continues today. Holiday Autos continually examines how IT can engender business advantage. Holiday Autos has stolen a march on its competitors by making it easier for partners like low cost airlines or lastminute.com to embed the Holiday Autos site within their own and has set the standard for e-business messaging in the travel industry. Its partners can rest assured that most bookings made through their web sites will reach Holiday Autos, generate commission and a high quality service to their customers.

Behind the success lies a clear e-commerce and IT strategy and a relationship with the Progress Company that supplied the e-business application development tools and database used to develop the whole browser-based operation.

"We give our customers the exact car they want, when and where they want it — just as our Progress-based application gives us the exact online reservation system we require."

Clive Jacobs

Chairman and CEO

Holiday Autos Group, Ltd.

Group IT director Alan Herbage is a firm believer in achieving greater globalisation through centralisation of IT. He says: "As the world's largest leisure car rental broker, we operate from 4000 locations in 40 countries through 17 direct subsidiaries and agent operations. We have developed a global browser-based distribution system of car rental bookings to both direct and travel trade markets, which means that whoever makes an Holiday Autos booking accesses and updates a common Progress database, a common set of business rules and receives the same high standards of response. However, local operations control the look and feel of our web sites to reflect cultural and national differences as well as language. At the centre we control the underlying functionality, business rules and new developments."

The car booking web site development began in earnest in October 1999 when Holiday Autos contracted Progress Software and its professional services division to help rescue a web project that was going nowhere. Starting from scratch, Progress delivered the internet-based online reservation system in 9 weeks, meeting the goal of going live before Christmas that year.

Building on the original web concepts, designs and architecture, Holiday Autos have developed a complete browser-based strategy for both Internet and Intranet functions to accommodate B2B, B2C and its internal telesales functions across all its markets worldwide. Functions are driven from one central global system consolidating all business transactions and management information into one central repository.

Herbage has built up significant in-house Progress skills to maintain a continuous programme of improvements and carried on using the DSDM project management methodology used by Progress. This breaks down a project into chunks or time boxes, which speeds up delivery. Holiday Autos consistently upgrades to the latest release of Progress OpenEdge. This version supports XML, enabling developers to create programs which read and write XML directly in the Progress 4GL and allowing data to be exchanged between Progress supported data sources and XML documents. The standard for exchanging data between disparate applications, XML is vital for business-to-business e-commerce — a factor that Holiday Autos used to its advantage. Holiday Autos also adopted Progress SonicMQ as its standard e-business messaging system. SonicMQ is a message transport system designed to

guarantee message delivery in the loosely coupled world of the Internet. It supports both one-to-many and point-to-point communications as well as rapid scale up. Putting these two technologies together led to a step change in Holiday Auto's web fortunes. Their use of XML has propelled Holiday Autos web site to be used by some of the UK's top 20 tour operators.

Herbage explains, "We were keen for others to want to embed our web booking system onto their web sites — in fact many IT managers out there assumed that the best way to achieve integration was for us to hand over our database and then they would code around it for access. The only problem was that every time we change something, we would have to send updates — not too onerous for one or two partners but we had many more in mind. I was also worried about integrity, security and controlling our business rules. We needed a way to interlink the sites regardless of the type of computing infrastructure and XML was the way to do it."

"I think we were the first people in the travel industry to deliver an end to end Interactive Digital TV solution," said Brian Coplin, development director at Holiday Autos, "We were able to deliver an XML standard which defines the structure of how Holiday Autos would like to send and receive messages. This standard simplifies and reduces the effort for our partners when linking sites together."

Holiday Autos proved the idea in a demonstration with partners OTC (Online Travel Corp) at the World Travel Market. The Holiday Autos system received an XML message from the OTC test site describing the destination airport, and pushed back another XML message, which displayed availability to the customer on the OTC home page. "The beauty of XML is that it gives us backwards compatibility which has enabled us to offer customers the ability to return to a booking, even after confirmation, to make amendments," says Coplin. "We then started to work with other external partners. They had concerns about uptime, service levels and message delivery. However because we are passing messages with SonicMQ, we are able to guarantee delivery even if the Internet connection is lost."

As well as ongoing developments with numerous partners, the XML/SonicMQ capability has opened up other new business opportunities and XML has also given Holiday Autos a new channel to market: they are the first to offer car rental bookings on both digital and Bush Internet TV.

SonicMQ is also set to keep the Progress databases synchronised. Herbage explains: "As we deliver more of our product via the web, we need to maintain high performance. With SonicMQ the updates between the two databases are automatic and SonicMQ guarantees that every message reaches its destination. SonicMQ is also used for on-line credit card authorisation message control and automated links to major suppliers such as Alamo, Hertz and Europcar."

Alan Herbage comments: "There is no doubt that e-business messaging opened up new opportunities for us. The partnership with Progress has proved highly beneficial giving us an integrated development and database environment that meets all our e-business needs and scales effortlessly to handle growing volumes. The database has also proved very robust and the cost of ownership is low. For example, in the past we needed two full time database administrators to look after our legacy Oracle applications, but Progress needs so little maintenance that the development and technical specialist teams keeps an eye on it"

"The web site developments are helping to achieve the goal of more online business, and through joint relationships with our partners, we are increasing brand recognition. Our Progress-based reservation system has improved our customer service, enabling us to offer more competitive pricing, lower our costs and increase our profit margins."

About the Progress Company

The Progress Company is a global supplier of software and services that simplify the development, deployment, integration, and management of business applications. The Progress® OpenEdge™ platform, with the industry's leading embedded database, delivers lowest cost-of-ownership applications that are rapidly implemented and easily integrated with other enterprise, extended enterprise, and Internet applications. The Progress Company and its 2,000 Application Partners supply more than \$5 billion annually in Progress technology, Progress-based applications, and related services. Progress customers span 50,000 organizations in more than 120 countries including 70 percent of the Fortune 100.

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