

HOW HOLIDAY AUTOS MAKES PROGRESS



IN SEARCH OF THE NEXT OPPORTUNITY

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 among 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, 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.

CHALLENGE

Increase online reservations, reduce costs, improve trading opportunities with travel partners via the Web, deliver superior customer service

SOLUTION

An industry-leading, XML-based online system to support customer reservations and partner bookings—based on Progress® OpenEdge® development tools, Progress® WebSpeed®, and Progress® SonicMQ®

BENEFIT

Multi-million pounds in Web books with revenues representing up to 65% of overall daily UK bookings

ACHIEVING EARLY SUCCESS AND INDUSTRY RECOGNITION

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.

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 and generate commissions and provide high-quality service to their customers.

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

“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.”

*Alan Herbage
Group IT Director*

ACHIEVING GREATER GLOBALIZATION THROUGH CENTRALIZED IT.

Group IT Director, Alan Herbage, is a firm believer in achieving greater globalization through centralization of IT. “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® OpenEdge® 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 center we control the underlying functionality, business rules and new developments.”

Holiday Autos initially contracted Progress Software and its Professional Services group to help rescue a Web project that was going nowhere. Starting from scratch, Progress delivered the Internet-based online reservation system in just nine weeks, meeting the goal of going live before Christmas that year. Building on the original Web concepts, designs and architecture, Holiday Autos has 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 program 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 the Progress OpenEdge integrated business application platform. This version supports XML, enabling developers to create programmes which read and write XML directly in the Progress 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.

INCREASING BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

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."

LEADING INNOVATION

"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."

EXPANDING TO NEW MARKETS

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 OpenEdge databases synchronized. 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 online credit card authorization message control and automated links to major suppliers, such as Alamo, Hertz and Europcar."

"There is no doubt that e-business messaging opened up new opportunities for us," says Herbage. "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."

MOVING BUSINESS FORWARD AND AHEAD OF THE COMPETITION

"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."

PROGRESS SOFTWARE

Progress Software Corporation (NASDAQ: PRGS) is a global software company that enables enterprises to be operationally responsive to changing conditions and customer interactions as they occur. Our goal is to enable our customers to capitalize on new opportunities, drive greater efficiencies, and reduce risk. Progress offers a comprehensive portfolio of best-in-class infrastructure software spanning event-driven visibility and real-time response, open integration, data access and integration, and application development and management—all supporting on-premises and SaaS/cloud deployments. Progress maximizes the benefits of operational responsiveness while minimizing IT complexity and total cost of ownership.

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