



Martinair

Quote

"The TOPCALL system brought us what we expected. In the course of time, it has grown from an EDI and fax system into a complete communication system that involves much more. We have encountered some practical problems, but they have all been resolved," says N.A. van Beek, IT Director at Martinair Holland.

Dutch airline company

Martinair recently celebrated its fortieth anniversary. During these forty years, the company evolved into a globally operating enterprise with an annual turnover of 1,4 billion guilders. For companies such as Martinair, communication is absolutely vital. And they use many different forms of communication, including fax, Electronic Data Interchange (EDI), and SITA, the largest network in the world for message exchange in the airline industry.

Challenge

For Martinair, tracing air cargo is extremely important, which means that it must be known at all times where exactly the cargo transported by Martinair is. The agents want to know not only when their goods were shipped, but also where they are and when they will arrive to their destination. Such matters can be realised by means of automatically generated messages.

A second requirement was the capability to send electronic faxes via the PC. Another matter that emerged was the possibility to provide flight schedules and rates to customers electronically. This should make it possible, among other things, to book cargo automatically. The last requirement was that the new system should also support communication over the SITA network. SITA is an expert in communication solutions, focusing especially on the airline industry. SITA's global network now has well over 100,000 nodes in 225 countries. "This is why one large-scale project was started to bring all of these forms of communication together. The project then evolved further into a complex organism, involving a variety of parties," explains Van Beek.

Solution

At the beginning of 1997, Martinair started working with EDI-TIE, a Dutch EDI specialist in Hoofddorp. They requested EDI-TIE to develop a new EDI system. Soon after Martinair realised communications needed to be transparently integrated as part of the same system. This led to contact with TOPCALL Netherlands. Martinair recently implemented a TOPCALL messaging system that integrates all of their communication streams.



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*Says Van Beek:
"Martinair is a large company, and we cannot allow ourselves the luxury of a communication breakdown. If the communication is good, the company stays healthy. A failure costs huge amounts of money, which is why all TOPCALL communication components have a backup, so that communication can continue uninterrupted, even if there is a breakdown. In the past, before we had the TOPCALL system, this was not the case. We used PCs as communication gateways, and they were unreliable and difficult to maintain."*

Result

On this basis, TOPCALL was able to construct a complete messaging infrastructure that also incorporated the distribution of flight schedules. Martinair compiles these schedules centrally on an RS6000 SP system. From here, the messages are sent to various destinations all over the world. It is essential that these flight schedules are delivered directly to the Martinair aircraft. The plane is not allowed to takeoff without this schedule. In the past, they were sent by fax. Now, the TOPCALL system handles the transmission and, on the basis of an Isocor X.400 MTA, ensures that information is transferred efficiently and reliably. Throughout the company, Martinair uses Lotus Notes for internal communication, for which TOPCALL also developed an interface, so both internal and external communications are now highly transparent.

Another interesting message stream now handled by the TOPCALL server originates from the aircraft themselves. Martinair's aircraft send out electronic messages (take-off, landing, doors closed, and so on). The Communication Server ONE receives these messages automatically via the SITA X.400 network, and ensures that the flight data end up in the right application. Thus, Martinair applications always have the most recent information. Martinair uses several IBM mainframes that run the applications vital to the company, such as the cargo automation system for managing the goods stream and financial processing. In fact, the TOPCALL system acts as a traffic policeman, as it were, and a switchboard between the various communication streams. It is remarkable that the Internet plays almost no part in Martinair's company processes. But they are now studying the possibilities, and if they decide to use this medium as well, it can be easily integrated into the existing TOPCALL system.

Far and away

The organisation of passenger and cargo flights is essential for an airline. This means that an airline is also completely dependent on flawless, reliable and uninterrupted communications. All kinds of far away sites must be reachable at all times, and that is now the case.