



Vail Resorts

.NET application improves reservation process

Industry

Travel

Services

- Custom .NET development
- Application architecture
- Web services and standards
- Application performance

Benefits

- Improved customer service by providing access to resources located both inside and outside the Vail Resorts network.
- With integrated support for Windows-based updating, AirLink allows Vail Resorts to quickly update client computers running the application.
- AirLink provides a single-user interface for reaching the resources that reservation agents need to do their jobs.
- Central reservations dramatically reduced its support needs due to the ease of updating AirLink.

Key Microsoft technologies

- SQL Server
- .NET Framework
- Visual C#
- Visual Studio
- Janus Systems WinForms
- Controls for .NET Suite
- NUnit with Plugin
- nAnt, nAnt Contrib, nAnt Plugin
- CodeSmith
- IBS Client Access v5r2 with Programmer Tools

Vail Resorts, with popular destination properties in California, Nevada, Colorado, and Wyoming, is one of the leading resort operators in North America and hosts winter and summer vacationers from across the globe. The company employs a staff of more than 15,000 during its busiest seasons to meet customer demand and derives revenue through a comprehensive offering of amenities at its resorts and resort hotels.

Vail Resorts' reservation agents, who book lodging, air, and ground transportation, were challenged by a central reservation system that was difficult to use and almost impossible to update. The custom-built system limited agents to shopping one class of service for one airline at a time, and 80 agents were limited to a maximum of 12 simultaneous connections to the online airfare service, Galileo International. The system frequently shut down when these connections were maxed out, causing expensive downtime and requiring technical support.

To improve customers' travel experience, booking air and ground transportation efficiently and at a competitive rate became increasingly important. The Microsoft .NET Framework provided an ideal platform to replace an outdated air reservation system and significantly improve the company's ability to integrate with online reservation services—and immediately improved sales and service.

Vail Resorts focused on building a new application with the following primary requirements: integrate easily with the AS/400 server and Galileo Web Services (GWS); reduce overall support; scale to meet new business and IT needs at the company; and provide reservation agents with an easy-to-use interface.

The EMC® Microsoft Practice worked with Vail Resorts to design a new application based on these requirements and, working together over a six-month period, developed a new reservation application based on the Microsoft .NET Framework. The new application, called AirLink, provides Vail Resorts' reservation agents with an easy-to-use application that integrates the company's central reservation system with an online airfare service and allows the company to scale its system efficiently to take advantage of new opportunities.

“The EMC Microsoft Practice’s proposal, methodology, project management skills, and references were unbeatable. Working side-by-side with EMC architects produced enormous buy-in from our IT department,” says Susan Rubin-Stewart, director of Reservations & Travel. “The EMC Microsoft Practice was extremely accommodating.”

The EMC Microsoft Practice used the .NET Framework to develop the architecture to connect to GWS using SOAP over HTTP through a Web services Internet proxy created in Visual Studio. This service provides reservation agents access to updated price and schedule information. By allowing AirLink to connect using Web services, an unlimited number of users can be logged on and no proprietary hardware is required to maintain the connections.

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The development team created the application user interface using Windows Forms controls in Visual Studio .NET 2003 and performed all tests and application reviews in a Microsoft Virtual PC environment. This ensured a high level of usability and contributed to greater user adoption once the system went live, allowing access to GWS and the central reservation system from one easy-to-use interface.

AirLink has been successful and allows Vail Resorts to be much more competitive with online travel sites. Vail Resorts increased its air sales by 42 percent the first three weeks that the system was online, and the company plans to leverage their investment in the .NET Framework as they look to replace other outdated systems.



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