



Royal Caribbean sets sail with agent extranet and new Web site

A vacation aboard a luxury cruise liner. It's a thought that brings smiles to work-weary faces. Planning such a vacation, on the other hand, can take on a different meaning. Consumers spend hours gathering information, travel agents spend thousands of dollars on private online booking services, and the cruise companies themselves bear the costs of network segment fees and toll-free phone reservation lines.

"We can now target the smaller shops that can't afford to pay private networking fees. Now all they need is an Internet connection and a PC, and away they go."

—Carlos Capote, Director of Technology, Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines

Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines, the world's second largest cruise company, saw a lucrative opportunity in alleviating the burden of booking a cruise. If it could bring consumers closer to the information they needed, and make it easier for travel agents to make the bookings, both groups would have more reasons to choose Royal Caribbean. Its solution: use the Internet to provide agents automated booking tools, and give consumers access to realtime cruise package and pricing information through an updated Web site.

Working with IBM Business Partner I/Net, the company created CruiseMatch 2000 Online, a Web-enabled version of its automated booking tools. Using IBM DB2 on an IBM AS/400 server, the extranet application allows agents to use Web browsers and an inexpensive Internet connection to access Royal Caribbean's reservation data. And the company's revamped Web site, located at www.rccl.com, uses IBM Net.Data running on an IBM RS/6000 server to provide customers realtime access to DB2 databases containing pricing and package information.

In just six months of operation, CruiseMatch has been adopted by over 1,000 travel agents, with an average of 25 new requests for access coming in daily. Carlos Capote, director of technology for Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines,

Application	Web site and online cruise booking service
Business Benefits	Extended distribution channel; 40 percent lower selling costs; reduced cost of online booking to agents; faster completion of bookings
Software	IBM® Net.Data™ IBM DB2® for AIX® IBM DB2 for OS/400® IBM DB2 Connect™
Hardware	IBM RS/6000® IBM AS/400®



Royal Caribbean's revamped Web site welcomes aboard over 4,000 potential cruise-takers every day.



says this greatly extends the company's distribution reach. "We can now target the smaller shops that can't afford to pay private networking fees," he says. "Now all they need is an Internet connection and a PC, and away they go."

Online services reduce selling costs, improve efficiency

Royal Caribbean will also benefit from lower distribution costs as the Web-based CruiseMatch application takes hold. Annette Hogan, Royal Caribbean's director of marketing automation, says online booking costs the company nearly 40 percent less than when agents book using the toll-free number. Hogan says it could take a travel agent more than 20 calls to Royal Caribbean to get the information needed to complete a transaction. CruiseMatch eliminates those calls completely, so agents can book cruises instantly. And, as more agents who use private online booking services switch to the Web-based CruiseMatch service, the estimated hundreds of thousands of dollars in annual fees Royal Caribbean pays private networks will be reduced significantly.

Response from customers is equally enthusiastic. Over 4,000 potential cruise-takers visit Royal Caribbean's new Web site every day. According to a recent survey, the most popular pages are those providing pricing and packaging information, proving that customers value direct access to the most up-to-date information.

In addition to accessing pricing and package information on the Web site, visitors can research the company's history, locate a local travel agent, and look up itineraries. With that information in hand, they can call a travel agent and simply ask to book a specific cruise.

Building a reliable extranet application and Web site

Designed as a complete shopping tool for travel agencies, CruiseMatch is accessible either through the company's extranet or through its home page. In both cases, agents must enter a password to use the service. Once connected, agents access realtime data on cruise pricing and availability, enter customer information, and make reservations. The CruiseMatch application resides on a dedicated AS/400 server, relaying requests between the RS/6000 Web server and the AS/400 business database server, where the pricing and cruise information resides.

When Royal Caribbean made the decision to build its new Web site, it upgraded the company's existing RS/6000 server. Kevin Keller, systems developer for Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines, explains that they had considered the Windows NT platform, but opted instead for the RS/6000 S50. "Ultimately, the ease of use of AIX gave it a significant advantage over other platforms," Keller says.

The RS/6000 server, using DB2 Connect, accesses DB2 data on the AS/400 business data server. "Initially," says Keller, "we looked at propagating the data from the AS/400, but because the data was so massive, we opted to connect directly to the AS/400 using DB2 Connect. Once we set it up, DB2 Connect maintained itself - we are very pleased with its exceptional performance."

Web site designers took advantage of Net.Data's Web macros to extract data from the AS/400 and present it realtime in HTML format. "By using Net.Data," Capote says, "we were able to redesign the processes behind our home page and alleviate the maintenance issues associated with hard-coded HTML."

Service and support for future growth

Royal Caribbean has begun compiling its online sweepstakes data, user profiles, and contest information into a central DB2 for AIX database on the RS/6000. Again, as Keller points out, Royal Caribbean faced a decision. "We could have gotten away with using an Oracle database product," he explains. "But we've always had good experiences in dealing with IBM, and we felt better with its support structure." The information is now being compiled for future decision support applications such as evaluating the success of particular events.

With its acquisition of Celebrity Cruises, Royal Caribbean will expand the 85 gigabytes of data residing on the AS/400 by 35 to 40 percent. Because such growth is an opportunity to further expand online services for passengers and travel agents, Royal Caribbean will continue to look to IBM for hardware and software solutions. "We have come to expect a variety of products from IBM," says Capote. "We have confidence that IBM will be able to provide end-to-end solutions for projects we will ultimately develop."

For more information please contact your IBM Marketing Representative or IBM Business Partner.

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