Total Software Management System

Discovery Travel Systems - Customer Success Story

Travel technology firm delivers first-class software to luxury ocean liner

Courtesy of Associated Press

Background

Discovery Travel Systems provides cutting edge solutions to the travel marketplace and works in partnership with its clients to achieve success. Founded in 1991, Discovery Travel Systems (DTS) began its travel industry career as a developer of third party cruise reservations systems. Incorporating much of the same complex inventory logic and reservations requirements for the cruise industry, DTS launched Tour Partner™. The company offers solutions for all types of travel marketers and cruise lines, from small niche players to mega producers. Customers include Star Cruises, Cunard, Celebrity Cruises, Royal Olympic Cruises, and others.

John Fraser, Partner, is charged with overall product development including quality assurance and deployment. With an in-depth background managing both travel services and IT services for the travel industry, John realizes that their products must continually evolve both technically and functionally to meet the constantly changing challenges faced by their clients. This is where Roundtable comes in.

Discovery Travel has been a Progress Application Partner since their company inception. As software requirements have evolved over that period, DTS customers have used versions of the DTS products that run in character mode, GUI, and are now web-enabled. DTS uses Roundtable repositories to maintain these different images of their software products. "We would be lost without the (Roundtable) product."

Currently, there are eight programers on the DTS development team working on various aspects of the company's flagship products. All software development work is managed using Roundtable. "Roundtable has enabled us to keep our development team very lean - Something which is so important these days - while managing a very complex application," says Mr. Fraser.

The Challenge

It was no surprise that DTS uses Roundtable to develop and deploy a version of their Ship Partner™ product for the new Queen Mary 2 (QM2). Ship Partner™ provides automated passenger, crew, and management capabilities throughout an entire voyage. It provides for a cashless billing environment with interfaces to a variety of point-of-sale systems. Capable of handling complex ship operations, the system accommodates multi-segment operations with passengers embarking and disembarking at a variety of ports. Check-in, credit establishment, and boarding security is included. Additional on-line interfaces to telephone, TV, and security systems are included for the QM2.

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Altogether, the QM2 needed extensive updates to Ship Partner™ for their on board operations. For example, today there are newer, more stringent federal regulations concerning passengers. To comply, DTS used the Progress OpenEdge platform to build a customized manifest application that accurately tracks embarkation and disembarkation of every passenger. "One thing that can be a sour experience if handled incorrectly is how to handle a couple thousand people all coming to [the] ship at [the] same time and having to go through passport clearance," said Jeff Richman, director of business solutions and application development for Miami-based Cunard, the owner of the QM2. "Capturing all this information in that short period of time with really no margin for error is extremely critical."

For the QM2, DTS developed and introduced Ship Partner Shore Excursion Module, which takes advantage of WebSpeed, an OpenEdge client processing technology and supports high-transaction volumes for browser-based applications. The program features an interface allowing passengers to examine and book outings directly from their cabins using their interactive TV.

To meet these challenges, DTS put Ship Partner™ through a major development cycle. However, even this is not unusual for DTS as most of their customers come to DTS looking for a solution that can be tailored to the unique operational requirements of their particular cruise ship or tour business. The sophisticated technology behind Ship Partner™ gives users a vast amount of flexibility in how they customize their system to enhance profitability and increase

sales. It facilitates dynamic packaging, allowing travel packagers to implement new marketing initiatives quickly, combining and selling any number of travel components including air, hotel, car, activities and transportation, for any number of people.

For DTS, this creates the need for managing completely separate versions of their product for each and every customer. This is where Roundtable earns its pay. Roundtable easily manages the different versions of software as well as the entire development cycle. For each version, Roundtable maintains the schema along with all the objects that comprise a release including data and code. Finally, it enables DTS to incrementally deploy upgrades to the QM2 and the various other customer-versions of their products.

Roundtable plays a particularly strategic role supporting DTS customers in another unique way: in order to insure that operations on board ship are maintained at the highest possible level of reliability, DTS provides a separate deployment copy of Ship Partner™ with every cruise ship that it serves. Having to keep one version separate from our other versions of software, "makes Roundtable critical," says Mr. Fraser. "When we had to do it manually, it simply didn't work. The software is far too complex."

Looking Ahead

Mr. Fraser observes "Increasingly, software development involves using repositories for screens and other components which are generated dynamically as an application runs. Roundtable is a critical tool for helping to maintain these data-driven elements."