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aws

Customer Case Study – Transportation

IATA pilots next-generation airline standards with DevOps and AWS

This aviation industry leader is poised to innovate and transform operations while securing increasing amounts of customer data when the industry rebounds from a global pandemic.

Our customer

IATA is the trade association for the world's airlines, representing about 290 members and 82% of air traffic, and supporting them with global standards for safety, security, efficiency and sustainability.

The obstacles they faced

IATA wanted to maximise the time during the pandemic disruption to innovate and achieve its goals of becoming leaner, meaner and greener — including accelerating its IT transformation.


How we helped

Public Cloud — Rackspace Managed Services for AWS; Rackspace Service Blocks; CloudHealth by VMware.

What we achieved together

IATA has embarked on a journey to accelerate innovation while optimising costs with the help of Rackspace Service Blocks™, which provide a flexible cloud consumption model, and CloudHealth by VMware®, which provides visibility into costs and continuous optimisation.





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Pascal Buchner, CIO, IATA

On a modernization mission

The aviation industry has been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 crisis, with airlines working on average at 30% capacity in 2020 compared to 2019 — and forecasted to drop to 20% in the final quarter of 2020. This drop in business has left most airline organisations in survival mode.

However, the International Air Transportation Association (IATA), which supports the aviation industry with global standards for airline safety, security, efficiency and sustainability, has decided to turn the

slowdown into an opportunity to innovate its IT operation and prepare for a leaner, meaner and greener future.

Pascal Buchner, Director of ITS and CTO at IATA, explains, “We don’t expect to be running at the capacity we were prior to COVID-19 until at least 2025. It is therefore vital that we are able to reduce our outgoing costs. But we also want to use this time to our advantage. Anything we can do now to innovate and transform our operations will be vital for scaling back up effectively when that time eventually comes, and for meeting customer expectations with the right health and safety precautions in place.”

IATA migrated from a private IT environment to Amazon Web Services (AWS) in 2014 and started working with Rackspace Technology™ in 2017. After experiencing the impact of the pandemic, IATA decided to seek support to engage in a challenging goal: modernising and streamlining its technology processes, while also reducing its operating costs.

According to Buchner, “As is the case for most other aviation organisations, becoming more sustainable has been our goal for some time. While this hasn’t changed, the challenges presented by the pandemic have put other priorities on our radar, so not only do we need to become greener, but also we need to work towards becoming leaner and meaner.

“This means taking advantage of a modern architecture, and removing legacy technology and processes from the equation. Doing so at such scale, while aiming to reduce costs significantly, may sound difficult to achieve, yet we believe that with the right technology partner by our side, we can be ready to operate as we want to by 2022. It’s about speed. If I can do it faster with less risk with a partner — and I believe Rackspace Technology is that partner — it will make this transformation a success.”

Going leaner — scaling down to scale up

After conducting an architectural review of AWS with the support of Rackspace Technology, IATA was able to confirm that legacy applications were blocking the digital transformation. In addition, it wasn't utilising many of AWS's best features, which could support its goal of streamlining activities, removing complexity and ensuring it could deliver maximum value with minimum resources — in other words, become leaner.

"The review highlighted that we weren't leveraging new technologies and services like containers and serverless," said Buchner. "This finding alone demonstrated to us the value of working with Rackspace Technology — to see where the gaps were and identify some quick wins to deliver savings, simplicity and increased automation."

While embarking on this transformation, IATA also needed to lower its operational costs to accommodate the reduction in business operations. To help achieve the savings, Rackspace Technology moved the company to Rackspace Service Blocks, a flexible cloud services consumption model that enables IATA to select the services it needs at different stages in its cloud journey. As a result, IATA now also has access to CloudHealth by VMware®, which provides complete visibility into all of its cloud platforms and can help with cost optimisation.

Automating for speed and ease

IATA wanted to give more power to its developers, who were spending too much time on quality reviews and test processes when building software. The association recognised the potential to have Rackspace Technology support its team in adopting DevOps to make the process more effective.

"In the past, before making any software changes, we had to arrange change control meetings for impact assessment. Only after the resulting report was finalised and approved could we move forward with the software updates," explained Buchner. "To streamline this process, we are aiming to use self-service platforms and minimize custom software development. This means integrating controls and applying automation, so that our developers can trigger testing automatically and put software into production at the click of a button."

IATA is also planning to apply this level of automation across some of its back-office activities, such as financial services, as well as to implement contactless processes at the airports themselves.

According to Buchner, "The reason people are not travelling today is because of the risk of infection from COVID-19 and the travel restrictions imposed by authorities. We want to significantly reduce that risk by removing many of the contact points that passengers currently pass through during their airport journey, and give them the option to perform many airport tasks on their mobile devices."

Buchner says, "Being able to deliver safety during COVID-19 is paramount to getting the industry back on its feet, and we cannot afford to make any mistakes, as many companies do when embarking on such an ambitious project. We are small fish in a big pond that Rackspace Technology has far more expertise in. So the support from the team will not only be a huge accelerator in getting the prototype to market, but is also vital to ensuring we avoid any traps and pitfalls along the way."



Becoming “meaner” — embracing a data- driven future

Another big driver for embarking on its transformational IT journey was to modernise IATA’s data management. This is more crucial than ever.

“We are in an ongoing crisis that will last for a long time. As such, we have lost all of the forecasting models that we used in the past,” explains Buchner. “It is no longer possible for us to forecast based on historic data, and our member airlines are struggling with a lack of visibility. We are therefore having to deliver new forecasting applications that provide meaningful information to the whole industry with far less data than we had before — this is where our goal of becoming ‘meaner’ comes in.”

In addition to this, IATA has to be able to comply with data privacy regulations such as the E.U. General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). This is especially important given it manages \$350 billion a year for its members, as well as passengers’ personal data, making the company a potential target for cyber criminals.

Buchner says, “We have a big responsibility on our shoulders, and regulatory compliance has only increased as we are having to ask passengers for more personal information to ensure it’s safe for them to fly during the pandemic. This is why Rackspace Technology is a great partner for us, as we know that the team has the expertise to guide us to design our environment with the right governance. On top of this, AWS is focused on delivering great cybersecurity. This will be even more valuable as we introduce Internet of Things (IoT) devices in airports, because we will need to very quickly scale to cope with the increase in data they collect.”

Going green — flying toward a brighter future

Despite the challenges presented by the pandemic, alongside AWS and Rackspace Technology, IATA hopes to continue its path as a best-in-class organisation that is leading the way for the rest of the aviation industry. As a result, it plans to make long-term changes that will enable it to consume fewer resources from the planet and, ultimately, regain trust from its customers.

Buchner concludes, “We are on a mission to represent, lead and serve the airline industry. As far as IATA is concerned, we simply cannot continue to operate at the complex level we have been if we are to survive. We must take this rare opportunity to become leaner, meaner and greener, supported by technology partners like Rackspace Technology and AWS. We hope that, alongside other organisations embarking on similar projects, our transformation and focus on becoming leaner, meaner and greener will set a precedent for the rest of the aviation industry.”

About Rackspace Technology

Rackspace Technology is the multicloud solutions expert. We combine our expertise with the world’s leading technologies — across applications, data and security — to deliver end-to-end solutions. We have a proven record of advising customers based on their business challenges, designing solutions that scale, building and managing those solutions, and optimising returns into the future.

As a global, multicloud technology services pioneer, we deliver innovative cloud capabilities to help customers build new revenue streams, increase efficiency and create incredible experiences. Recognised as a best place to work, year after year, by Fortune, Forbes, Great Places to Work and Glassdoor, we attract and develop world-class talent to deliver the best expertise to our customers. Everything we do is underpinned by an obsession with our customers’ success — our Fanatical Experience™ — so they can work faster, smarter and stay ahead of what’s next.

Learn more at www.rackspace.com/en-gb
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