

# British Airways Global Customer Relations Program Takes Off with Astute Solutions' ePowerCenter™



As a premier global airline, British Airways (BA) travels to 216 destinations across 94 countries, serving over 36 million people a year.

In 2003, BA launched a global customer relations initiative aimed at overhauling its technology infrastructure and service processes (baggage, compensation, etc.). Astute Solutions' ePowerCenter consumer interaction management solution was selected to accomplish BA's expansive objectives.

The solution delivered the unprecedented functionality that today fuels BA's uncompromising service. It enabled a total view of the customer, enhanced information gathering and reporting, and significantly streamlined processes, thus playing a key role in improving BA's service quality and effectiveness across all customer touchpoints.

The airline industry has many distinct challenges. Competition, regulation and fuel prices are examples of the uncontrollable external pressures in aviation. Many of these variables have the potential to impact the passenger experience. Yet, in the airline business, like most consumer-oriented businesses, service quality is the main brand differentiator. Understanding this reality and desiring to differentiate the BA passenger experience, British Airways partnered with Astute Solutions to overhaul and optimize its customer service recovery process and systems.

## Situation

Flying 36 million passengers annually to over 216 destinations, British Airways is the United Kingdom's largest international scheduled airline. Customer service is at the heart of BA, and the airline takes pride in providing passengers with a world-class service experience.

Inevitably, there are occasions when service standards are compromised. To mitigate passenger dissatisfaction in these situations, BA has a network of

customer relations offices, responding to passenger communications through channels such as phone, mail, email and fax.

In 2003, BA completed a review of its operations across customer relations and identified a number of key issues and opportunities:

- The existing processes were complicated and lengthy
- Multiple customer databases were being created across the airline
- It was not possible to report on company-wide service failures

BA's challenges were further complicated by its non-integrated collection of technologies. For example, the company was using two separate and heavily modified applications in the UK and US, and had no formal systems in place at some of its other locations. Without an integrated view of customer interactions, BA had limited control over the effectiveness of its service recovery activities. This led to excessive customer relations expenditures due to:

- Less efficient case handling and compensation processing
- Multiple/duplicate claims for the same incident
- An increase in goodwill abuse

## Objectives

These findings led to a series of initiatives with the following objectives:

- To create a single, global customer service platform connecting all customer relations sites and 350+ service representatives
- Improve the speed and lower the cost of service recovery, by increasing operational performance and productivity
- Provide timely and relevant feedback to the company, and become aware of service problems immediately
- Increase operational performance and productivity
- Improve passenger compensation procedures across 145 airport locations

Following a rigorous vendor evaluation process, BA chose ePowerCenter from Astute Solutions to help achieve these objectives.

“Astute had the technology we were looking for, but their experience in our industry and organizational commitment to their customers’ success was of equal importance to us,” said British Airways Global Customer Relations Manager, Richard Stabbins.

“We needed to have confidence that the company we selected could successfully handle a global implementation. We had that confidence with Astute.”

## Solution

Astute Solutions met BA’s aggressive implementation schedule, rolling out the ePowerCenter solution across key locations within nine months. An entirely web-based application, ePowerCenter was deployed as a unified solution, running as a single application on a single, global database. ePowerCenter replaced 11 non-integrated systems and is currently being used in more than 25 countries. The reduction in technology platforms helped BA reduce its total cost of ownership, while enabling better cost management across the organization.

“Astute’s solution was the backbone of our program. We expected it to significantly impact efficiency, customer recovery and continuous improvement on a global scale. And it did.”

- Frances Taylor, Head of Global Customer Relations, British Airways

The solution was designed to deliver excellent responsiveness across BA’s global wide area network (WAN). Even during peak load times with more than 230 agents processing cases concurrently, there is no degradation in performance.

By capturing customer issues across all communication methods, ePowerCenter provided BA with a global view of all customer interactions and service issues at

a granular level. In addition, ePowerCenter enabled BA to work with external and existing legacy information systems. Through a web-services interface, ePowerCenter was integrated with reservation systems, baggage tracking and operational customer databases, giving service representatives a complete view of customer information in real time.

## Phase Two

Upon completion of the ePowerCenter case and issue tracking implementation, the next step was to add and develop a passenger compensation solution for use across the BA airport network. On the occasions when a passenger's bag is lost or onward flight connection is missed, the airline is required to offer cash to cover the passenger's out of pocket expenses. In partnership with Travelex, Astute developed a compensation solution that fully integrated with the ePowerCenter platform, extending it from the contact centers out to BA's airport operations.

ePowerCenter replaced 11 non-integrated systems for British Airways.

The technology platform reduction helped reduce total cost of ownership while enabling better cost management across global customer relations sites.

Known for its currency services, Travelex is one of the world's foremost issuers of pre-paid debit cards. Once issued by an airline representative, a passenger can use the card to obtain cash at an ATM or to make purchases at any point of sale.

Utilizing multiple currencies (Pounds, U.S. Dollars and Euro), the solution enables ATM cards to be activated and funds loaded in real time. Simultaneously a record of the transaction is created in ePowerCenter. The new compensation service is currently offered at over 110 airport locations, and when fully deployed, will be available at more than 140 airport locations around the world.

The impact of Astute's work was felt immediately, as British Airways Head of Global Customer Relations, Frances Taylor, explains:

"Astute's solution was the backbone of our program. We expected it to significantly impact efficiency, customer recovery and continuous improvement on a global scale. And it did. Today, the ePowerCenter solution enables our service representatives to quickly resolve customer issues, enhance recovery and continually improve our ability to measure and act on what our customers are saying. It is vital to our continuous improvement program."

## Results

The British Airways' strategy to improve service recovery was contingent on its ability to provide fast, efficient, and effective interactions. Astute's solution delivered BA's objectives and enabled the following:

- A unified, highly scalable solution now handles over one million interactions per year for BA--replacing its numerous, non-integrated systems
- Claims and other complex customer relations processes that sometimes took weeks to complete are now simplified and reduced to one hour or less--an efficiency gain exceeding 1000%
- In place of a lengthy, manual process, BA airport teams can now issue compensation to customers on the spot when needed via a compensation card. The card is ready for use at thousands of ATM or Point of Sale (POS) locations worldwide, greatly enhancing the recovery process
- Service quality greatly improved through the automation of workflow between departments and regions
- BA now has the agility to allocate resources where they are needed most because it has real-time visibility into passenger experiences
- Because ePowerCenter's enhanced data collection and reporting capabilities provide the entire organization with an in-depth view of the passenger experience, BA can now enhance its product offering based on better information

Together, these organizations are enhancing service for millions of passengers around the world while raising the bar on what constitutes truly enhancing the customer experience.

## About Astute Solutions

Astute Solutions builds the world's smartest consumer engagement software, enabling consumer-focused companies to differentiate through service excellence. The award-winning ePowerCenter product family is the number one end-user-endorsed solution for optimizing operations for more personalized experiences.

The choice of leading Global 1000 companies, Astute Solutions' customers include McDonald's, British Airways, Levi Strauss & Co., L'Oreal USA, Scott's, GlaxoSmithKline, Neutrogena, Abbott Labs, Dunkin' Brands, Sara Lee Branded Apparel and many more of the world's top consumer brands.