

Eurotunnel on track for excellent customer responsiveness.

Overview

■ The Challenge

To increase the cost effectiveness of its online business, Eurotunnel needed to improve the reliability and flexibility of its Web site

■ Why become an On Demand Business?

Eurotunnel required a Web infrastructure that could flex to cope with demand peaks

■ The Solution

A scalable infrastructure hosted and managed by IBM

■ The Benefits

- Ability to sense and respond to market threats and opportunities quickly and effectively
- Multi-million pound online revenue safeguarded
- Extra online capacity available and paid for as needed
- Improved customer service
- Better statistics on which to base strategic plans
- 99.9 percent availability guaranteed by a service level agreement



In 1994, the opening of the Channel Tunnel provided the first fixed link between the UK and mainland Europe. Eurotunnel manages the infrastructure of the Tunnel and operates accompanied truck and passenger (car and coach) shuttle services between the UK and France. Based in Folkestone, the company employs 3,500 people and has annual revenue of £548 million. Eurotunnel is the market leader for cross-Channel travel and was used by 2.3 million motorists and 1.3 million truckers in 2003.

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- Chris Jacobs, Chief Information Officer at Eurotunnel

Growing into an On Demand Business.

On Demand Business benefits

- A dynamic, flexible sales and marketing Web site that reduces the cost of sales
- Improved management of market volatility
- A better customer experience
- Improved online marketing campaigns
- Increased security and resilience.

Managed hosting defined

- A secure, scalable hosting service that flexes to meet demand
- Scalable support to identify and resolve problems quickly
- A variable cost structure to match usage.

Key components

Software

- IBM Director
- Microsoft® CMS
- WebTrends

Servers

- IBM @server xSeries

Services

- IBM e-business Hosting Services

IBM Business Partner

- Pasporte.

Although there is only one Channel Tunnel, Eurotunnel faces stiff competition from cross channel ferries, hydrofoils, hovercrafts and low-cost airlines. The market is very price sensitive meaning the company must minimise the cost of customer transactions to remain market leader. Some years ago, Eurotunnel made the decision to conduct as many customer transactions as possible online as a cost-effective alternative to using travel agents and telephone call centres. An available, resilient, responsive Web site is critical to Eurotunnel remaining a viable business.

Recognising the need for change

Eurotunnel reached a position where 50 percent of all its consumer business was generated online. Unfortunately, the quality of service from its hosting providers was not good and was seriously affecting performance of the site. The site was often unavailable and there were no clear channels of communication through which to get updates about technical difficulties from the hosting provider. Popular promotions on the site would exacerbate the problems of responsiveness and availability causing at least one high profile failure that resulted in negative press for Eurotunnel. Downtime resulted in lost sales opportunities and lost revenue. Chris Jacobs, Chief Information Officer at Eurotunnel said: "We predicted that online business would increase to represent between 70 and 80 percent of our consumer business. We needed to guarantee that our infrastructure would cope with peaks in demand and remain predictable."

The company's difficulties were compounded by the fact that its content management tool was slow and tedious to use. This hindered efforts to react quickly to changing market threats and opportunities. The tool was so out of date that support for it was about to be withdrawn. Eurotunnel needed to find a flexible replacement that made it easier and quicker to get online marketing campaigns up and running to maximise sales opportunities.

A further problem was that Eurotunnel was unable to gather reliable information about how its Web site was performing, who was using it, what they were using it for, what they were buying and where they were losing patience with or interest in the site and signing off. The company needed this information to back up its online strategy and improve customer experience.

"IBM was determined to deliver on time and provide what was required. The team worked in a professional manner, organising regular project meetings to ensure everything was on track. If there was a project milestone delay they worked hard to make sure the next one was reached on time to meet our challenging project deadlines."

– Chris Jacobs, Chief Information Officer at Eurotunnel

Starting the journey

The time had come to radically improve Eurotunnel's online services. A formal tendering process was carried out to find a partner to host and manage its Web site. Each organisation tendering was asked to suggest the infrastructure that would best address Eurotunnel's requirements. "IBM presented the solution that was closest to our expectations in terms of resilience, robustness, reliability and scalability. It had all the attributes we were looking for plus we felt IBM was most likely to achieve the tough service level agreements (SLA) we wanted," said Jacobs.

IBM Business Partner, Pasporte, undertook the application development and now provides Eurotunnel's hosting environment. The hosted environment includes ten xSeries servers and has inbuilt flexibility to accommodate peak demand. Based on a variable cost structure, it delivers maximum flexibility to Eurotunnel. The company only pays for extra capacity when it is needed, ensuring that online transactions are as cost effective as possible.

As part of the project, Pasporte, in conjunction with IBM, developed a Content Management Solution based on Microsoft CMS, a Web content package. The content of Eurotunnel's existing Web site was migrated into this at the same time as the site was moved to its new hosting environment.

WebTrends, a Web analytics solution from NetIQ is used to provide Eurotunnel with information on Web site usage. This enables detailed monitoring of the profile of customers using online facilities, enabling return on investment (ROI) to be evaluated and future capacity to be planned.

IBM and Pasporte both worked closely with staff from Eurotunnel during this project and skills transfer occurred naturally as a result. However, when necessary, IBM or Pasporte provided training to staff or advised on what external training was necessary. Both developer training and user training was delivered, particularly around the use of workflows in the content management solution.

The project was a long term one and Eurotunnel underwent some significant changes during its implementation that affected requirements. The solution was adapted to meet the new scenarios and IBM helped Eurotunnel assess all its possible options.

Eurotunnel set tight timescales for both migration of the Web site infrastructure and getting the site up and running which IBM achieved. Jacobs said: "IBM was determined to deliver on time and provide what was required. The team worked in a professional manner, organising regular project meetings to ensure everything was on track. If there was a project milestone delay they worked hard to make sure the next one was reached on time to meet our challenging project deadlines."

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Picking up speed

From the outset, the hosting solution provided by IBM achieved the fast response times and 99.9 percent availability required by the SLA and is proving to be secure and resilient. It has helped Eurotunnel safeguard its multi-million pound online revenue stream. In contrast to the past, the Web site now responds dynamically and reliably during peak times. IBM provides extra bandwidth when usage is high enabling Eurotunnel to manage market volatility and unpredictability.

Visitors to the Eurotunnel Web site, who are usually potential customers, now have a vastly improved experience of the site. It is more responsive and easier to use. Eurotunnel can check on a daily, monthly or annual basis how many people are visiting the site and what they have done. This means strategic plans can be made in line with customer demands. The content management system enables Eurotunnel to implement plans quickly and respond effectively to changing market threats and opportunities.

Building the platform for an on demand future

"We are not an IT company that has years of expertise in hosting Web sites," said Jacobs. "By handing everything involved in hosting and managing our site over to IBM we have been able to make the most of the in-house IT expertise we do have and free resources to focus on our core business of transporting people and goods across the channel."

The partnership between Eurotunnel and IBM is developing and growing and, over the next few years, Jacobs can see the possibilities that working together could bring. With its new infrastructure, Eurotunnel has already taken the first steps along the road to becoming an On Demand business. "We can tap into a vast pool of IBM expertise as and when we require," said Jacobs. "This will help us scale up to meet future demands on our business much more easily than we could have done in the past."

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