Don't Just Book It – Protect Your Data!

A Thomas Cook Case study of GlobalSCAPE EFT Server

Overview

Thomas Cook is a travel operator with a difference – along with traditional retail spots along the high street and a high presence online, and in media, they also own and run an airline. This makes them uniquely placed to respond to market demand and gives them the opportunity to expand as the need arises, instead of responding to the overall pressures of booking an airline to fly their customers to destinations. They mix this with using other airlines and acting as a travel operator, though their primary concern is selling space on their flights. They have extended their market share into areas such as independent travel and financial services related to travel, as well as maintaining their exclusive holiday destinations.

They struggle with the transfer of sensitive data, due to the various sizes of agencies and teams they deal with, meaning that the company frequently has problems with their file transfers – insecure email transfers, or printed/faxed/lost material would prove to be common in these environments, as well as costly, non joined up payment processing solutions.

HANDD Business Solutions believed they could solve this and set about designing a 'joined up' system, with emphasis on security, controlled by the main office, with no need for additional software, no matter the location of the end user. "Thomas Cook contacted HANDD Business Solutions to discuss possible solutions and we were delighted to offer them one – a managed file transfer (MFT) system called GlobalSCAPE Enhanced File Transfer Server® (EFT Server), " comments Anthony Hodges, CEO, HANDD Business Solutions." After a lengthy consultation, we worked with the project management team to install GlobalSCAPE, and ensured that an ad

hoc system of updates, as required was also offered as part of the contract."

HANDD felt GlobalSCAPE EFT Server would preserve the company's ability to manage and offer the ability to control data. Concurrent to these issues is the ability to update the company's current 'stock' and fleet in real

time to allow them to sell it effectively – whilst still allowing for the workflow management of their product – this two pronged approach leads to various access and update issues that can only be solved using an integrated platform, as offered by GlobalSCAPE EFT Server.

Compliance is a major area of contention in business, as legislation and regulation changes and updates – each issue that is solved with compliance creates another set of problems or workflow changes for companies not already implementing the basic upgrades to the system – these problems will increase with each iteration of legislation introduced, which at each step, will increase the costs and design issues with creating and implementing a solution.

Company Strengths

Thomas Cook and associated groups have a team of approximately 31,000 people, including hospitality and management at their resorts, airline staff (pilots, stewardesses and support), tour guides and staff in their travel agencies, along with support staff, customer service centres and a strong web presence team. They are rated highly as employers and offer a range of positions at all skill levels. They have recently undergone restructuring, streamlining around 500 managerial positions from their teams. This volume size leads to need for more file transfer support.

They operate in distinct areas around the globe, providing a market leading, strong or recognisable profile in all areas – these six areas are broadly stated as the US, UK, Germany, Northern Europe, Central Europe and Eastern Europe. As expected, the UK and US account for a sizeable portion of the revenue available. Due to this, there is a definitive need for secure transfer, payment processing and a joined up booking process.

Thomas Cook Group have introduced a number of measures to maximise their mix of mainstream travel, independent travel and travel related financial services, allowing them to perform robustly in each sector as the need arises. The system must cope with expansion and needs to be able to deal with the restructure and additional pressures sponsoring the Olympics might bring, creating key growth.

Possible Business Problems

The travel industry handles a lot of sensitive data that could lead to their customer's privacy and safety being compromised, so it's important for the groups undertaking tour operations, hospitality and flights to understand the complex needs of file and information transfer. These complex needs include the ability to sell the world over – with such a diverse group of agencies, sales areas, and territories, it is important that their infrastructure can handle, not only the transfer and easy access of deals, offers and key information for clients, but the straight forward transfer and creation of invoices, ticketing, and itineraries, alongside the essential elements of running both an airline and hospitality team. Diverse business needs and information distribution can lead to multiple points of both failure and breach, leaving the business vulnerable to investigation, fraud and loss of licences. Customer centric approaches can also lead to problems, such as securing customer data and protecting their customers from fraud and interception while traveling. For this reason, the recommendation of GlobalSCAPE

EFT Server made the most sense, and after a period of consulting, HANDD worked out a tailored installation to protect specifically against these needs.

File Transfer Problems

One of the bigger problems with File Transfer is the distribution to several locations at once – this distributable network has to function - not only in live locations, but in a perpetually live environment online, giving rise to even more areas where breaches or other problems could arise. These interfaces do not lend well to simplified software and are often designed to operate as bolt-ons or adjunct to one another, which can create workflow and file problems. Each of these in real time terms could cripple a business, creating more issues for companies already beleaguered and beaten down by the current economic crisis.

This problem will also extend to protecting customer data – unless the server or other transfer systems are secured at both ends, then there are an almost infinite number of breaches that can be exploited. FTP is basic file transfer at best and at its basic level, can only transfer files. If the connection is dropped, it's possible that the file will have to be restarted, and re-uploaded. This is a waste of time, bandwidth and ultimately money.

FTP also has several basic security and auditing problems – that leads to failures in compliance, data loss and other issues that can lead to the revocation of licences or certifications in certain industries.
These issues can create an attitude of reliance on other forms of data transport, which will also lead to more possibilities of data breaches. In the case of travel agents, the agility of the data and ability to access it will allow the travel agent to book holidays while they are available, without overbooking, and also allow the easy support and effortless information transfer to its satellite properties and assets- giving the opportunity to control scheduling, flight data, and sensitive customer information, required for hotel visits with ease.

HANDD Business Solutions Provided the Answer

HANDD Business Solutions felt that MFT based solution GlobalSCAPE EFT Server would be most suitable to upgrade Thomas Cook's infrastructure, secure their data transfers, provide a solid base for the support of data breach prevention, and other FTP to FTP problems. It provides seamless integration with Outlook and allows for the support of future legislative changes that may be introduced, in areas such as compliance and encryption.

"Each solution has its flaws, drawbacks and positive elements – each should be weighted carefully against the needs of the company in question, without creating additional issues to work flow," says Anthony Hodges. " One of the most important concepts when considering MFT solutions is to look at what the recommendations are of your expert – as they will know what systems function well and though they may have specific leanings towards different types of system, their primary concern should always be supporting you in choosing the right system for you.

HANDD
Business Solutions

Integration is often easier to accomplish with the products that extend your system, but at a minimum the upgraded system should solve the following problems:

- FTP to FTP issues surrounding security problems. Encryption and decryption should come as standard in industries dealing with confidential or financial information – these could be provided as an add-on, or extension, or as standard.

- Large file transfer via email – integration to Outlook is often a common feature of these products and gives the opportunity to support the reduction of bandwidth burden on your transport system, while allowing the transfer of sensitive data via encrypted means.

- Finally, MFT should solve the problems associated with time loss due to FTP errors and data faults – not only will it allow for standardised training on the errors that could occur but will also cut down on one major fault – the interruption of files. As standard, MFT clients include a 'resume on interrupt' protocol which helps minimise on errors and issues caused by error that has uploaded and been interrupted.

After consultation and support, Thomas Cook integrated 'GlobalSCAPE EFT Server' with the support of external contractor.   This integration allowed them to extend their infrastructure, while keeping up with the fast paced changes that the travel and tourism industry needs.

GlobalSCAPE Overview

GlobalSCAPE, is a global software and services company that supports all forms of file transfer, including FTP and secure transfers. They offer a range of access solutions and support that allows them effectively provide for the business end user and home user, to complex commercial systems. GlobalSCAPE EFT Server, or Enhanced File Transfer Server, is a system that provides extensive options for secure protocols, including extensible SSH(2), SSL, FTPS, and a set of features that will allow and support extension, workflow, and logging with minimal integration into logging systems.

Conclusions

Ultimately, the design and integration of any system falls to several key choices in the company, based on infrastructure, current platform and other key needs. These needs will produce key documents in supporting the choices required and will allow users to decide which system they need