Each and every traveler is unique. With our Big Data and Talend platform, we offer ‘made-just-for-me’ travel experiences, from purchase planning through the post-flight stage.

Gauthier le Masne, Chief Customer Data Officer, Air France-KLM.

Catering to each and every traveler

Air France-KLM is a world leader in its three main business lines: passenger transportation, cargo transportation and aeronautics maintenance. With 90 million annual customers, 27 million FlyingBlue members and nearly 2.5 million unique visitors on the Web each month, customer data processing is a key issue for the Air France-KLM group.

Meeting customers specific travel needs

In the field of air transport, it goes without saying that competition is intense. It has proven difficult for Air France-KLM to set itself—and its prices—apart from low-cost companies. Making its products stand out against those of its Asian and Gulf competitors has also been a challenge. And the challenge no longer really lies with customization of the customer experience, but with hyper-customization.

“We are entering an era where we must cater to each and every one of our customers,” Gauthier Le Masne, Chief Customer Data Officer, explains. Nowadays, “the products themselves are no longer enough. The quality of our relationship with customers and the services they receive is what will set us apart from the competition. When it comes to what satisfies customers, the product only ranks tenth behind more service-related motivators. Customers don’t expect their carrier to “transport them”, but rather “to meet their specific travel needs”.”

Within a few years, the amount of data available to airlines has exploded. Sites and applications also generate numerous interactions. For example, a sale is made every five seconds on AirFrance.com. In addition, there are exchanges with the company’s 16 million Facebook fans and three million Twitter followers, as well as data from media campaigns, since Air France-KLM is one of the few advertisers to carry out its own media buying process online.

A big data platform for centralizing customer data

While the group began collecting customer data several years ago through call centers, social networks and its staff at airports, airport lounges and on airplanes, the data collected to date has not been centralized. Thus, the first challenge was to combine all customer data on a common platform for all Air France-KLM businesses. “The idea was to have our customers’ data centralized on a Big Data platform so that they can be contextually redistributed in real time to all of our customer service points,” Gauthier le Masne continues. The platform was set up in the first half of 2016. “We relied on the Hadoop platform that we already had in place.”

Why Talend?

The second challenge was data management: “We had to get organized in order to ensure data quality, to respect the privacy of our customers and to offer both our customers and our employees a clear benefit,” Damien Trinité, CRM Big Data Project Manager, explains. “We placed Talend at the heart of this platform in an effort to duplicate and streamline information and to ensure quality data.” “We placed Talend at the heart of our Big Data platform.”

“Talend Data Quality gives us a competitive edge,” Damien Trinité continues. “Our customer data is high-quality data. Phone numbers and emails are essential for booking flights, and it’s fairly easy to reconcile online and offline information since visitors to these sites and applications are most often connected to their personal accounts.” Every month, a million pieces of data are corrected with Talend.

In addition, Air France-KLM may collect and process personal data concerning passengers (PII -Personally Identifiable Information) who use the services available on its website, its mobile site and its mobile applications. Do we have the right to identify
customers without their explicit consent? The company is committed to respecting privacy protection regulations regarding its passengers, loyalty program members, prospects and website visitors. All personal data processing is carried out with Talend Data Masking, which makes it possible to anonymize certain sensitive data and make them unidentifiable in order to prevent unauthorized access.

"Talend Metadata Management has helped us implement data governance with data stewards and data owners to document data and processes," Damien Trinité concludes. "Air France-KLM can locate customer data, determine its origin and destination and share the information within the company ten times faster than before."

Improving the travel experience through a 360° approach to the customer

"As soon as the customer departs, they're on the move and need support," Gauthier le Masne explains. Travel time to the airport, notification of flight delays or cancellations, wait time at the airport, luggage tracking... The company has thus identified its customers' main stress factors to be able to anticipate them to the greatest possible extent and be as proactive as possible.

In the field, call center agents were the first to take advantage of this data management solution. "Rather than just having a FlyingBlue profile, for example, they now have the customer's entire history," says Gauthier le Masne. In addition, more than 5,000 tablets were distributed to teams at the airports. As for the flight crews, all flight pursers also have an iPad. "This gives them access to all information about flights and customers. In concrete terms, if a customer usually opts for a vegetarian meal but the reservation agent forgets, the company will take the initiative to offer the option."

On the sales and marketing side, an engine designed to recommend destinations has been set up. Based on the pages consulted on the website, Air France-KLM created algorithms that help offer customers promotional rates for their next preferred destinations.

Between a personalized and non-personalized email, the results of tests seem rather encouraging: "We send a billion emails a year to our customers. With our destination recommendation test, we have increased the rate at which customers opened email messages by two points over that of conventional messages. We're keeping conversion rate under wraps, but it has also increased significantly," Gauthier le Masne assures.

But the biggest revolution to the customer experience could come from "bots." KLM is one of the first travel providers to have launched its conversational robot on Facebook Messenger, which gives access to all travel information (boarding passes, flight status, etc.). "People who travel occasionally do not necessarily download our apps," Gauthier le Masne explains. "Bots allow them to access the same level of information as is available on the app. We are also experimenting with basic responses to customer requests, and recognition systems for text, reservations, flight schedules and other items," he explained.

The company also already has a presence in China on WeChat, as well as on Alitrip, Alibaba's travel application. "The idea is to be where customers are."

The next step is to transform the test. "We must ensure that our 360° customer approach is properly executed, and we must establish the habit of anticipating needs in order to solve problems before they arise," Gauthier le Masne concludes. For example, the group developed a geo-tracking system to calculate the time it will take to get to the airport and, within the terminals, to prevent travelers from getting lost in the airport hub. "GPS, GSM, Wi-Fi, beacons... We work with several technologies to try and find a combination that will provide as much accuracy as possible."