



Northwest Delivers Vital Information to Passengers Faster with PAR3 Notifications

When a winter storm or other emergency causes multiple flight cancellations, airlines have traditionally had to pull hundreds of sales agents off inbound calls to personally contact each affected passenger. To improve upon this labor-intensive process, Northwest Airlines implemented the PAR3 proactive notification platform, which could deliver revised itineraries to more than 10,000 customers an hour through personalized phone messages. The PAR3 notifications have satisfied Northwest's customers by getting important news to them more quickly, while allowing the airline's agents to stay focused on revenue-generating sales calls.

"With PAR3's platform in play, we are in much better position to balance our dual objectives of revenue generation and great customer service."

Managing Unpredictability

If a flight gets cancelled, the passengers naturally want to know right away – preferably, before they depart for the airport.

"Northwest Airlines works to contact customers as quickly as possible when an event changes their travel plans," says Steve Brown, managing director of customer experience technology for Northwest. "Speed is of the essence, and customers want specifics on what to expect."

The problem is, when an unpredictable event such as a storm occurs and multiple flights are cancelled, the airline must reschedule customers by the tens of thousands. To expedite the rebooking process, Northwest implemented a sophisticated algorithm within its Worldspan reservation system to rapidly place passengers on alternative flights. But to get these new itineraries to the customers, the airline still had to telephone each one individually.

Notifying passengers in this way was slow, with each agent only able to reach 8 to 12 customers an hour. In the meantime, inbound callers had to wait longer for service. His affected not only customer satisfaction, but also revenue generation, since inbound calls produce the bulk of ticket sales.

Highly Personalized, Two-Way Communications

To increase the speed and efficiency of its passenger notification process, Northwest implemented the PAR3 Intelligent Response Platform™. PAR3 interacts with enterprise data applications, delivers personalized messages to customers by phone, email, fax, pager or PDA, and relays their responses back to the relevant databases.

Northwest Airlines saw PAR3 as an ideal solution for notifying passengers when their flights change. The platform could readily integrate with the airline's Worldspan system and rebooking algorithm, delivering new itineraries to passengers within 6 to 15 minutes of each schedule change. The messages would feature a natural, high-quality recorded voice, with text-to-speech technology used only to read the passenger's name. And, the airline could apply detailed business rules to the notifications.

For instance, Northwest specified that if the passenger in question had earned "elite" status, they should have the added options of connecting back to a live agent or forwarding the notification to others toll-free. PAR3 implemented the rebooking notification application for Northwest in less than seven weeks. It went live in May 2001.

How It Works

1. PAR3's XTAP Gateway, installed at the Northwest data center, continuously monitors a shared database for new rebookings.
2. When a rebooking occurs, the relevant passenger contact information is extracted from Northwest's reservation system, Worldspan, and is stored in an Oracle shared database.
3. PAR3 applies the airline's preset rules to determine the time, type, and destination of each notification.
4. The PAR3 XTAP Gateway converts these data to XML and sends them via a secure Internet connection to its data center.
5. PAR3 merges each customer's personalized data with the appropriate prerecorded message template, and sends out the notification via its telephony servers.
6. The results of the notification are entered into the passenger's record in Northwest's Worldspan system, making the information immediately accessible to reservation agents.

Notification Example

This is Northwest Airlines with important information for the <Last Name> party. Please press any button to listen to this alert. [Button press]

*Your Flight Number <Flight> departing <City> at <Time> on <Date> has been cancelled due to <Cause>. You have been rescheduled on Carrier> flight <Flight> departing <City> at <Time> on <Date>, arriving <City> at <Time>.
[Repeat for all rebooked flights.]*

We apologize for the inconvenience. Your reservation is complete. Your confirmation number is <A as in alpha> <B as in bravo> <C as in Charlie> <1> <2> <3>.

If you have any questions regarding your reservation, press 1 to be connected to Northwest Airlines.

To forward this message to another phone number, press 2.

To repeat this message, press 3.

Thank you for flying Northwest Airlines.

More Time for Customers, More Time for Sales

Between May and November of 2001, Northwest sent out more than 250,000 PAR3 notifications. "Our customers reacted very positively to the service," says Brown. Northwest also realized significant business benefits:

- **Increased Speed:** PAR3 can contact tens of thousands of customers per hour. By implementing the platform, Northwest can reach passengers faster, often before they leave for the airport – which has a significant impact on customer satisfaction.
- **Business Focus:** Prior to implementing PAR3, Northwest sometimes had to pull hundreds of agents away from answering sales calls. "With PAR3's platform in play," says Brown, "we are in better position to balance our dual objectives of revenue generation and great customer service."
- **Productivity:** It would have taken Northwest agents approximately 12,500 hours to deliver 250,000 notifications. Agents have been able to use this time instead to generate revenue and deliver other customer services. And, the airline has avoided the disruption of switching agents from inbound to outbound calls.
- **Cost-Effectiveness:** Deploying the PAR3 notifications has been more cost-efficient than the time-intensive manual process Northwest used previously.

In September 2001, the PAR3 system became unexpectedly critical to Northwest. "After the September 11 tragedy, it was more important than ever to quickly communicate with our customers," recalls Brown. "The PAR3 solution enabled us to immediately send notifications to all those customers whose travel plans had been impacted – without compromising service to other customers or critical parts of our business."

Overall, Brown concludes, "PAR3 has allowed us to provide a better customer experience without straining internal resources during this increased time of need."



NORTHWEST AIRLINES