



### The Challenge

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The most innovative solutions are never the result of taking advice or following the lead of the tried and true. Sure some *good* solutions do, but Port Columbus International Airport (CMH) was not simply looking for a good solution. Like most airport directors, in May 2002 Elaine Roberts was focused on growth in the post 9/11 era, riddled with struggling carriers and increased regional competition.

"Traditional revenue streams were impacted by 9/11," said Roberts. "Raising our rates to offset lost revenues was not an option to solving the economic downturn. In fact, it could have made problems worse." Instead CMH focused on some not-so-obvious ideas: creative cost control and innovative revenue streams.

### Background

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In 2000 the executive staff at CMH realized that continuing to purchase disparate, proprietary systems through various airport projects resulted in system incompatibility, double entry of data, inaccurate reporting and lost information. In 2001 CMH took the initiative to formalize the Information Technology (IT) Department by hiring an IT manager with experience implementing a Help Desk and consolidating systems.

The first action was to develop a standard platform that the airport could support. The platform had to be cost effective, scalable, and designed to improve efficiency. CMH selected Microsoft as its standard platform, from desktop to server and database, to email. With the support of the executive staff, a new server farm was purchased, a new network infrastructure was deployed, and additional personnel were hired. As a result, CMH has a highly trained IT staff with the technical expertise to support the platforms in which all airport software operate including the flight/baggage information system, the 911 system, the glycol collection system and the digital video surveillance among others.

In 2002 CMH began the process of selecting a new Flight Information Display System (FIDS). The plan was to select a FIDS system that would work with the newly developed platform standards and deploy a fiber backbone down each of the 3 concourses that would facilitate FIDS as well as future wireless and CUTE initiatives. There were several requirements that the system had to meet to be considered. The system had to run on Microsoft's SQL Server platform, be hosted in-house, work with LCD screens as well as a multi-screen marquee video wall, be able to present Flight Information on the Authority's web page and support video paging.

CMH organized a project team to make recommendations for how to proceed. Their first task was to clearly identify a guiding vision. As challenges were raised and addressed, they realized that they had some ground-breaking ideas that could mean great things for the airport.



### The Vision

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At the heart of CMH's vision were three simple ideas that would guide their decision making. First, *the airport is the entry way to the greater Columbus region*. A positive relationship among its businesses is in everyone's best interest. Second, *create positive experiences for customers*. Due to increased security, travel has become more cumbersome. Any effort to accommodate passengers would improve their experience. Finally, *technology is an investment, not a cost center*. It was critical that any technology purchase would deliver measurable value.

#### The Airport Is the Entry Way to the Greater Columbus Region

Columbus, Ohio is the largest city in Ohio and the fifteenth largest in the United States. More than 6.7 million passengers travel into and out of the community through CMH. Newland explained, "It became clear in our discussions that we were in a unique position to reach out to local businesses for their help in crafting a unified message that Columbus is vibrant, progressive, and an important economic center." By dealing directly with local businesses, CMH sought to tighten the bond within that community.

#### Create Positive Experiences for Passengers

Let's face it. Since 9/11 passenger travel has become an ordeal for the average person. Passengers must arrive two hours early, wait in line at the security checkpoint, and then be subject to search. While some passengers welcome the increased security, many view it as an inconvenience. The vision at CMH was to improve passengers' experiences with accurate, easy-to-get information and allow them to make the best use of their extended time at the airport. By creating a passenger-friendly environment, CMH believed they could improve satisfaction, particularly for business travelers.

#### Technology is an Investment, Not a Cost Center

"Technology needs to be more than cool," explains Jim Bodi, Manager of Information Technology. This is likely the most important concept that the CMH team focused on because it most directly impacts the success or failure of the project. If a solution wasn't going to generate revenue, reduce costs, improve customer satisfaction, or integrate the city and the airport, then CMH wasn't interested. Additionally, technical systems infrastructure needed to be reliable, scalable, and easy to maintain before it would be considered.

### The Solution

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The CMH mantra was simple: They had a vision and wanted it realized. The team at CMH identified several key projects to launch the transformation. When the project required vendors, research was conducted, criteria were established and potential providers were systematically measured for the best solution. "We wanted partners," said Newland. "We needed them to work well with us and in some cases, work well with each other."

#### Flight Information Display System

First CMH set out to replace the FIDS system with a true out-of-the-box twist. Because *technology is an investment, not a cost center*, the team wanted to place high-impact advertising on the FIDS screens. The idea was that local businesses would find it more advantageous to advertise where they knew potential customers are looking: at arrival and departure screens as well as baggage



claim displays. They also knew that the capabilities of the latest software and LCD-TFT display technologies could provide stunning visual impact to passengers.

CMH selected Com-Net to provide the FIDS solution. "Com-Net proposed the only solution capable of bringing our vision into reality," said Newland. "The system is open and flexible and the hardware was commercially available, off-the-shelf, PC and network components," said Bodi. "We were able to leverage our IT staff to manage and support the system. If we experienced a critical failure, the resolution would need to take hours rather than days."

Com-Net's solution included several public arrival and departures displays as well as integrated advertising at seven baggage claims. The 40-inch NEC-Mitsubishi LCD-TFT displays in the bag claim area have local advertising and public service announcements scheduled 24 hours a day. As promised, when there are no bags on the carousel the advertising automatically resizes to fill the entire screen.

The showpiece of the Com-Net FIDS solution is a massive video wall which consists of 21 40-inch rear projection displays in a 7X3 configuration. The video wall displays arrivals and departures on 12 of the outside displays while the middle nine monitors show advertising and public service announcements 24 hours a day.

Com-Net also provided CMH with an XML export to the public web site. Now passengers are able to check the status of their flights from anywhere. As part of their future plans to extend flight information out into the community, CMH offers their flight data free of charge to local hotels, restaurants, and convention centers. CMH also plans to broadcast delayed and cancelled flights via Com-Net's ECLIPSE- AM Radio to passengers within 3-5 miles of the airport.

CMH selected Interspace Airport Advertising to work with Com-Net because of their expertise in creating high impact airport advertising. Interspace sells and oversees advertising production and placement. Advertising revenue increased 300% in the first quarter it was implemented. "We estimate that we will recover 100% of the FIDS system price in 36 months," according to Newland. "Advertising space is sold out and local businesses are in line to get on board." Jim Bodi added, "The partnership of CMH, Com-Net and Interspace has been exceptional. The FIDS system is state-of-the-art, the advertising is eye catching and CMH has a system that will be a revenue center, rather than a cost center. This is truly a win-win-win situation."

The Com-Net ECLIPSE software was innovative and easy to use. Com-Net not only met of the requirements, they exceeded them. The system is very stable and Com-Net's service has been outstanding.

### **Wireless Internet Access**

Immediately following the FIDS deployment was the Wi-Fi project. CMH wanted a wireless system that would support 3 distinct groups: the public, the authority and the airlines. Each group had to be secure and isolated from the others. After much research CMH selected Symbol Technologies.

Symbol's solution provided a quick and easy way to deploy the wireless network while providing a centrally managed switch. Symbol's solution supports 4 separate networks and was installed by CMH staff in a matter of 3 weeks. Since the network is managed from 1 switch, CMH had been able to change security settings and upgrade the entire system within minutes, as opposed to hours or days. CMH now offers high-speed wireless Internet access throughout the Terminal for free.



### Results

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CMH has dramatically increased customer service and enhanced the community awareness through use of technology. "By linking features of today's technologies together, we have achieved positive results on many fronts," says Newland. "Customer service and appeal- by displaying accurate, timely flight data and baggage information on modern screens, playing video media advertising, and blanketing the entire terminal complex with free wireless access- are a few of the recent attributes of today's technology at CMH. We get positive feedback on our systems everyday,"

The results are staggering. Passengers report that they will actually select flights based upon layovers in airports like CMH, where high speed Internet access is available. That means they are getting comfortable in the restaurants and lounges at CMH where they can catch up on email or read the latest news. This project has done wonders for improving the passengers' experience.

Since the fiber backbone and wireless network have been installed, CMH has experienced more innovation and productivity. An Internet Kiosk provider has leased Internet access from CMH and deployed a Kiosk in each Concourse in just 2 days. The Operations department at CMH now provides field weather reports via a wireless laptop from the warmth of their truck, rather than running inside as they had in the past. We will continue to leverage technology in new and innovative ways we may not have thought of...yet.

### About Com-Net Software

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Com-Net Software Specialists is the largest dedicated provider of information display systems for airports, airlines and mass transit in North America. A division of Signature Technologies, Inc., Com-Net is a market leader in providing sophisticated turnkey solutions that include computer hardware, software, electronic signs, installation, maintenance and support. Com-Net information display systems are installed in more than 225 airports and mass transit terminals worldwide. For more information call 1-800-899-2638 or visit [www.comnetsoftware.com](http://www.comnetsoftware.com).