

# KEEPING GDS TECHNOLOGY ON THE RAILS

Amadeus and Rail Plus have linked to make rail bookings seamlessly available via a “smart tab” on the Amadeus GDS. With Australian-developed technology at its core, both companies see the development increasing the competitiveness of rail against air, particularly among corporate agents.

By Ian McMahon

AUSTRALIAN travel agents will be able to integrate rail content into the booking process more efficiently following a deal between the GDS company and wholesaler Rail Plus.

The development makes use of Amadeus “smart tab” technology to enable agents to seamlessly incorporate Rail Plus bookings into a single PNR with mid-office integration.

For the GDS the arrangement with Rail Plus represents a significant extension of its ability to offer non-air content in an agent friendly way.

For Rail Plus the exclusive contract with Amadeus presents the opportunity to widen its appeal to leisure agents and to make inroads into the corporate sector where rail travel has hitherto been little used.

During a visit to Australia earlier this month, Amadeus Rail business unit manager Diane Bouzebiba said the GDS’s rail offering has its origins in technology developed by Australian company, Onerail.

The Amadeus 2008 takeover of Sydney-based Onerail was the catalyst for the development of its rail business unit employing 120 people in four centres in Sydney, Toronto, Bad Homburg and Nice.

Rail bookings have been widely seen as complex and difficult for agents to integrate into, for example, a multi-part Europe itinerary.

But Bouzebiba said deregulation of rail in Europe, while it did not arrive with a “big bang”, has “changed the mindset” of major European rail companies and has seen the continuing evolution of a more streamlined rail booking environment.

Rail Plus managing director David Stafford noted that Eurostar bookings are available 180 days in advance while 60-90 day forward booking periods are common on other services.

He said 87 per cent of Rail Plus bookings now come through its website which Bouzebiba lauded as “best practice” in rail booking.

A “smart tab” on the Amadeus GDS will give agents seamless access to this Rail Plus content enabling single-screen integration into PNRs, said Stafford.

“The productivity gains go further than that with the mid-back office able to pick up the booking data and eliminate double handling,” added Bouzebiba.

These efficiency gains are likely to be particularly attractive to corporate agents, Amadeus and Rail Plus believe.

Said Rail Plus national sales and marketing manager Greg McCallum: “Many corporate consultants in Australia treat their GDS as a one stop shop. Historically Rail Plus has had no visibility within the GDS, so we lacked profile.

“The smart tab will increase awareness levels in the corporate market, and through improved front and back office efficiencies, make it much more attractive to sell international rail.

“Rail Plus should see an immediate impact from this new partnership with Amadeus.”

Bouzebiba is enthusiastic about the increasing competitiveness of rail travel against airline travel, pointing to the impact of the “green effect” and the growth of high speed rail.

She said Western Europe currently has 4000 kilometres of high speed rail with another 5000 kilometres scheduled to be added by 2020.

She said Amadeus planned



Rail Plus in the Amadeus GDS environment

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— Greg McCallum

“considerable investment” in rail booking technology over the next 10 years.

With the Rail Plus deal, Australia and New Zealand have become the second market (after India) into which Amadeus has introduced its rail technology. “It is a continuation of our global strategy to work with key partners in bringing rail content to the desktops of travel agencies around the world,” said Bouzebiba.

She added that Amadeus is offering technology to rail operators as well as to agents.

She identified CountryLink and Queensland Rail as two operators who late last year adopted Amadeus technology that reduced booking processes to four steps.

An Amadeus statement announcing the link with Rail Plus claimed: “The ability to search and book rail content

quickly and easily will allow Amadeus users to provide their clients with superior customer service via the increased choice of travel options for overseas travel, with rail an attractive alternative to air in terms of speed, cost and convenience.”

Amadeus IT Pacific managing director Sari Vahakoski said: “To be able to bring our customers rail content fully integrated into their workflow, from the PNR through to mid office reconciliations, is a very exciting development for us.”

Noting that “rail is an increasingly attractive option for both leisure and business travellers” David Stafford said: “Integrating our extensive rail content directly into the travel agent’s workspace will make the rail booking process more efficient and accurate for Amadeus users.”

## 'New' CCTE has better analysis tools, says Travelport

TRAVELPORT says the latest version of its mid-back-office solution, Cross-Check Travel Enterprise (CCTE) will streamline mid and back office functions, enabling agents to concentrate on the business of selling travel.

CCTE will integrate into Travelport's GDS product suite and provide a complete, end-to-end booking workflow (*travelBulletin*, December-January).

This will eliminate the need for travel agencies to have separate invoicing, accounting and CRM systems, the company states

The new version of CCTE was launched late last year, with some of the new functions already available. Those highlighted by Travelport include:

- New reporting capabilities will enable "more comprehensive analysis of agents' business and better utilisation of data", says the company.

Among the new features are the "Quote to Booking Tracking and Reporting" function which monitors the complete lifecycle of the booking for agents, and the "Trip Forward Sales Report", which provides an overview of future bookings to help agents plan for budgets and marketing activity.

- Also launched in December were enhanced accounting functions such as "Auto Reconciliation of Third Party Suppliers", which improves third party reconciliations, according to Travelport.

- Some CRM functions have already been improved, with agents more easily able to upload client information including passport and credit card details.

"Travelport is committed to its ongoing investment in CCTE and to ensuring that it is relevant to the needs



of travel agents today and into the future," said the company's Asia-Pacific product manager Linda Kelly-Smith.

"We are continually consulting with our travel agency partners on ways to further drive efficiencies and improve productivity in the mid and back office, and developing tailored solutions for the local market."

Other enhancements to CCTE will include the ability for travel agents to customise narratives, formats and fonts so they reflect the style of their travel agency, and enhanced automatic and seamless download from other online booking engines such as Galileo Online Travel.

Travelport also points out that the nearly 1000 Australian travel agents using CCTE have access to classroom learning, comprehensive online and virtual training.

- MEANWHILE, Travelport has revealed a huge increase in use of its travel agent networking site [www.travelportopinions.com](http://www.travelportopinions.com).

The tool, which connects members

of the global travel industry and harnesses their collective travel knowledge, reached a total of 7300 members who generated more than 9000 questions and answers by the end of 2010, representing a user increase of 200 per cent.

Australia was one of the countries with a notable rise in members, according to Travelport. Others included the UK, France, Belgium, Switzerland, the UAE and South Africa.

"Statistically every hour saw at least two new registrations, one review added and 15 messages shared around the world while users spent on average 15 per cent longer on the site," the company announcement stated.

It also said 75 new features and enhancements were added last year including a *people you may know* application, *latest activities of your contacts*, an improved email alert system and an enhanced forum layout.

This year has seen the introduction of "groups" – a means to form niche communities based on shared interests and location within the site.

## SiteMinder expands global footprint

CHANNEL management company, SiteMinder, has expanded its foothold in the UK market. The Australian company has announced that London-based boutique property portfolio, Grange Hotels, has signed it to manage its online distribution to third party booking channels.

Grange Hotels represents 16 independent four and five-star hotels in central London including luxury boutique properties such as Grange St Pauls Hotel, Grange Holborn Hotel, Grange Langham Court Hotel and The Buckingham.

SiteMinder, which was founded in Sydney, in 2006, opened its first European office in London in April 2010.

SiteMinder's business development manager for the UK and Europe, David Williams, said his company will help Grange manage its online distribution more effectively.

"Online bookings for hotels are rising dramatically and managing their distribution in the most effective manner is becoming vitally important," said Williams.

"SiteMinder is helping groups like Grange Hotels save time by providing an efficient, easy-to-use system, that provides complete two-way integrations to the world's top booking websites." Grange Hotels' revenue manager, Radka Ivanova, said: "We have chosen SiteMinder to optimise our online distribution through their unique pooled inventory model.

"Because SiteMinder automatically adjusts our inventory each time a booking is taken on any online channel, all of our available inventory can be exposed to all channels without the risk of overbooking.

"We don't need to split our inventory across sites so we are maximising online selling opportunities."

## Our Record Collection

At SERKO Online we've always been confident that we're good at what we do. It's encouraging though, when others praise our achievements and with 2010 providing us with a number of key awards, it's clear that the market recognises us as the leader in the field that we aspire to be.

Thanks to everyone who has independently endorsed and supported our efforts: the industry, various media and particularly our clients. It's your way of telling us to keep doing what we do best: make your lives easier with our technology.



# Tramada, Air Tickets link to provide streamlined solution for agents

TRAMADA Systems and Air Tickets will next month release an application that streamlines the financial settlement for airline tickets.

The companies claim it is the first initiative of its kind in the Australian market place.

They say the development is a response to the changes to IATA regulations announced in April last year that came into effect from July 1, 2010.

These new regulations include having accredited agents submit to a new range of reporting requirements, replacing the former financial assessment point test.

An IATA accredited agents must now undergo a minimum share capital and reserve test, a profitability test, a working capital to meet overheads test and a client travel account test. (Alternatively they may provide an insurance bond or bank guarantee.)

For some agents the changes had the effect of making IATA accreditation less attractive than ticketing through consolidators.

Said Air Tickets group general manager Russell Carstensen: "The feedback we heard from many

agents, hitherto wedded to their IATA accreditation, was that these requirements were just too hard, the nail in their IATA coffin if you like.

"We have seen more and more agents using our services because by using Air



Tickets they are able to reduce the cost of being in business, eliminate the risks associated with ticketing errors and manage the procurement of airlines tickets in the most efficient way.

"We are proud to provide our clients with the highest standards of service including 24/7 ticketing with airfare and ticketing rule validation and our wonderful 'Name Your Own Price' functionality."

However, in discussions with

Tramada, both parties recognised that "this swing towards using the Air Tickets service to avoid the onerous conditions around self-plating could create a BSP type reconciliation nightmare for their mutual customers,

especially those with large volumes".

Tramada has always provided an automated BSP reconciliation process to assist agents efficiently manage their ticketing, so they decided it made sense to create a similar process for the Air Tickets statement reconciliation.

In a joint statement announcing the initiative Air Tickets and Tramada pointed out: "Industry changes can be so disruptive for agents who just want to focus on the core business of selling

as much profitable travel as possible."

Tramada chief executive Jo O'Brien commented, "For us this development makes complete sense and is in line with our core value proposition which is all about data integrity and process improvement for our clients.

"We have included this feature in our 'Next Generation' product and there will be no additional charge to access this function.

"The beauty of delivering Tramada via the internet (technically 'Software as a Service') means that we can release this exciting development to all our clients at the same time overnight, with no down time or interruption during business hours.

"We are thrilled to be providing our clients with this unique, market-leading functionality that once again proves that being a local provider of technology means we are focused on the needs of our customers in the Australian marketplace.

"It has been wonderful to work with Air Tickets who have this same regional focus and commitment, as well as expert knowledge of travel agency business practices."

"I need  
to work smarter"



Talk to Amadeus

Today's travel businesses demand access to fast, open technology supported by specialist expertise. And that's what we provide. Our solutions are scalable, reliable and they lead the market. With Amadeus Smart Tabs' 'open' technology, you can book preferred supplier content and integrate the booking data back into the PNR without leaving the Amadeus Selling Platform environment, no matter if it is air, hotel, car rental, rail or cruise content. Amadeus has always been at the forefront of simple, yet powerful ways to save time and improve productivity - showing why it powers more than 400,000 desktops around the world.

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*Steve Ash, Director, Business Technology, HRG Australia*



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## Flight Centre, eNett ink global payment services deal

TRAVEL industry payment solutions provider, eNett International has clinched an agreement with Flight Centre to enable the processing of payments for all of the chain's online businesses.

"The eNett solution will deliver greater process efficiencies, improved performance and risk management, as well as generate significant cost savings," the company's announcement claimed.

The eNett system, half-owned by Travelport, competes with Moneydirect, now owned by Amadeus. Flight Centre has recently renewed its GDS contract with Travelport's Galileo.

PSP, Travelport's joint partner in eNett says the system facilitates credit, charge and debit card processing across all channels, Automated Clearing House (ACH) payments in any direction, as well as relevant alternative forms of payment in most major markets.

"Being selected as Flight Centre's global eCommerce payment services provider is a tremendous endorsement of our capabilities," said eNett International executive director Rob Bishop.

# Serko beds down with The Hotel Network

ONLINE travel management provider, SERKO, has forged a new association with accommodation broker, The Hotel Network (THN).

The result, according to both companies, will be "faster and easier travel bookings across Australia" for corporate travellers.

They say that by joining forces, they will be able to offer companies and government agencies a combination of a wider more choice of accommodation options using The Hotel Network's bank of 4500 properties plus a more efficient booking process, using SERKO's online, self-booking technology.

New Zealand-based Serko provides a range of automated travel solutions and services to leading travel companies and corporations across Asia Pacific and has made significant inroads into the Australian market.

The company claims to enable cheaper corporate travel bookings, higher travel agent productivity and, critically, much greater control over the process of travel bookings and management.

The Hotel Network was established



Meriton Serviced Apartments Broadbeach

in 1993 as an event manager. In 2003 it developed an accommodation management and reporting service for government agencies and has now broadened its services to cater to companies and travel agents managing corporate travel.

Managing director of The Hotel Network, Nick Brooke, said the link between SERKO's online booking

tools and The Hotel Network's comprehensive accommodation content, allowed businesses and government departments to book all flights, accommodation and hire cars throughout Australia in a simple, single booking process, while applying and maintaining their own travel policies.

"The Hotel Network already offers an accommodation booking and management service at more than 4500 properties, enabling travel agents, large companies and state and federal government departments the ability to book their individual negotiated rates at their own choice of hotels," Brooke said.

"This connection with SERKO provides an extremely streamlined booking process for SERKO customers.

"It's about combining accommodation choice from THN and SERKO efficiency.

"Your typically busy travel managers can now plug into the huge range of THN properties and, by using the simple, super-fast SERKO online booking tool, make their job easier, delivering efficiencies to their organisation as a whole."



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## Core business focus for Travelport following \$US720m sale of GTA

TRAVELPORT says that its proposed sale of GTA to Kuoni will enable the company to focus on its core business while also providing funds to pay down bank debt.

Travelport announced earlier this month that it has reached an agreement to sell its GTA business, one of the world's largest wholesalers of ground content, to Kuoni for \$US720 million.

According to a Travelport statement: "The agreed sale is in line with Travelport's strategic plan to focus on maximising the potential of its core business."

GTA, which became part of the Travelport group following Cendant's 2005 acquisition of London-based Gullivers Travel Associates and a number of other travel distribution companies, is a major global provider of hotel accommodation and related land content.

According to the Travelport announcement of the sale, GTA offers instant confirmation of bookings with more than 35,000 hotel properties in over 130 countries.

Other GTA travel services – distributed through travel wholesalers and retail agents as well as being offered direct to the public – include sightseeing tours and attractions, private transfers, group travel and rail passes.

Travelport said GTA's total transaction value (TTV) for the year ended December 31, 2010, was \$US1.887 billion. Net revenue was \$US294 million and adjusted EBITDA was \$US84 million.

"The net proceeds from the sale will be used to pay down Travelport bank debt. As at September 30, 2010, on a pro forma basis for the proposed sale of GTA, group net debt was \$US2.761 billion," the Travelport statement said.

"Travelport will report earnings for the year ended December 31, 2010 on March 30, 2011, when it expects to report adjusted EBITDA of \$US545 million and net revenue of \$US1.996 billion for Travelport excluding GTA.

The transaction, which is scheduled for completion in May 2011, is conditional on majority approval by Travelport's bank lenders and a vote by the shareholders of Kuoni in favour of a capital increase by Kuoni to finance the transaction.

However the Kuoni and Hugenobler-Foundation, which represents 25 per cent of the voting rights of Kuoni, has already irrevocably committed to vote in favour of the capital increase.

Travelport chief executive and president Jeff Clarke said: "Our strategy is to focus our energies on maximising the potential of our core proposition and, while GTA is a leader in its field with a strong proposition, this is a positive opportunity for us to accelerate our plans. "Additionally, Kuoni is a well known and long-term customer of Travelport and our aim will be to work in partnership with them to improve further the distribution and sale of the combined Kuoni/GTA inventory."