In the palm of your hand

Ethiopian Airlines’ mobile app boosts customer satisfaction and revenues

To enrich the end-to-end customer experience, Ethiopian Airlines built a dynamic mobile app, which has resulted in increased customer satisfaction, as well as an upward trend in revenue. The airline is among the first to use Sabre’s one-of-a-kind technology for mobile experiences.
Most people these days don’t leave home without their smartphone. In fact, most people don’t go anywhere without some type of smart device. We have come accustomed to using our smart devices to glean a variety of information wherever we are, whenever we want or need it.

Airline customers are no different. They have come to rely on their smart devices to guide them through their entire travel journey.
At Ethiopian Airlines, we want to be on that journey every step of the way with our customers. Therefore, in a quest to boost the overall customer experience and improve direct sales, in late 2017, we set out to introduce a mobile app with numerous local and international payment options, along with many other customer-centric, self-service features.

From the start, we outlined specific criteria for the initiative:

1. It would be built on top of a platform as one of the pillars of Ethiopian's ICT (information and communication technologies) strategy.
2. The platform would be based on orchestrated, open, discrete application programming interfaces (APIs).
3. The open APIs must be easy to understand and ready for accelerated innovation cycles by in-house technical resources, especially with customer-facing products.

After a thorough examination of potential solutions, we decided to develop the mobile app using our in-house technical team. However, we lacked the technology necessary to build the app, therefore, we turned to our technology partner, Sabre, for assistance.

**Finding the right solution**

While traditional web services proved to be complex and required a steep learning curve, our project team found another method to develop the mobile app. Through our partnership with Sabre, we learned about SabreSonic Digital Connect.

API-based Digital Connect enabled us to achieve faster speed to market with new digital experiences. It offers streamlined API management and flexibility and can easily enable optimized and personalized customer experiences across all digital points of sale including web, mobile web and mobile apps.

The solution is an orchestrated service that exposes key capabilities of Sabre's e-commerce platform as APIs while abstracting its underlying architecture and infrastructure. Simply put, it enabled us to develop our own user interface, leveraging the capabilities offered by Digital Connect APIs.

For us, Digital Connect was a most-awaited platform that provided a foundation to execute our digital-solution strategies. It enabled our developers to build a robust mobile app that delivers a seamless customer experience. It is open, well documented and orchestrated with a light-weight message format. It covers all key customer touchpoints across the entire customer journey including booking, payment, ticketing, management of bookings and check-in services. The services are discrete, which enable us to create a self-organized, agile team for similar future developments.

**Building the app**

We wanted to develop a mobile app with basic services that would accept conventional credit cards. At the same time, we wanted to give our customers a high-quality, easy-to-navigate experience. Using our app, they can easily book flights, check-in and download their boarding pass, manage their trip from beginning to end and make purchases through simple and easily manageable payment options.

It took two months to build, which we believe is the fastest any airline has developed a commercial application from scratch.
The Digital Connect platform helped us significantly reduce time to market and define the customer experience without any dependency from an external party. The services are straightforward, and we haven’t had problems, even when we assigned less-experienced employees.

As we state on our website, one of our most valuable missions is to ensure Ethiopian Airlines is the airline of choice to its customers, the employer of choice to its employees and the investment of choice to its owners. Building our mobile app helps us stay true to our mission, as well as helps solidify our position as “The Best Airline in Africa,” a prestigious award we have received from AFRAA for seven consecutive years.

The benefits

The platform enabled us to launch new distribution channels through the mobile app, with speedy time to market, increased revenue and improved customer satisfaction. In terms of revenue, the mobile app achieves up to 7 percent of the monthly penetration of systemwide sales.

Customers are enjoying the experience, which has been incrementally deployed with potential features to continually improve the customer experience. The number of downloads since the launch of the app has reached more than 400,000.

The platform gives us the freedom and flexibility to integrate various payment options. In fact, we were the first Africa-based Airline to integrate Alipay, the largest mobile and online payment platform in China.

Future innovations

We positioned Digital Connect as a core for innovation of various initiatives, especially to quickly adopt technology and address business trends related to customer experience. Our airline innovation program projects, which are designed on top of Digital Connect, include airline-domain-based chatbots for booking, check-in and the contact center, as well as NDC-based APIs for potential corporate customers, aggregators and online travel agencies.

In addition, our equity partners and subsidiaries that share the same host system will also leverage the API ecosystem for their mobile applications. Our technical team developed Malawian Airlines’ mobile application by reusing the existing APIs, which is economical and quick to market.

Basically, as a result of our mobile app, most anything our customers need during their travels with us is in the palm of their hand.

For additional information about Ethiopian Airline’s mobile app, contact Miretab Teklaye at: MiretabT@ethiopianairlines.com.

For additional information about Digital Connect, contact Joyce Schofield at: joyce.schofield@sabre.com.