As one of the world’s most extensive airline freight operations, Delta Cargo services more worldwide destinations than any other airline. A division of Delta Air Lines, Delta Cargo operates major North American cargo hubs in Atlanta, Cincinnati, Detroit, Memphis, Minneapolis-St.Paul, New York-JFK, and Salt Lake City, and works with a number of carrier partners to serve 66 countries and more than 375 cities. International freight accounts for close to two-thirds of Delta Cargo’s revenues. Delta Cargo has a number of product offerings to meet the needs of the world’s largest freight forwarders as well as mid-sized and smaller shipping operations.

Bringing Harmony to Disparate Platforms

Enabling its customers to make cargo bookings online was a major focus for Delta Cargo after it launched the DeltaCargo.com web site. While it didn’t take long for the carrier to provide its customers with tools to make online cargo reservations, it had to use three separate sources to maintain capacity for different types of services and customers.

The DeltaCargo.com booking portal could only be used by customers for U.S.-based shipments and capacity was managed by Delta Cargo in Atlanta. All non U.S.-based bookings were offered through Descartes GF-X Exchange, one of the largest electronic information and reservation systems in the airfreight industry. However, capacity for U.S. Export shipments were managed through the U.S. Cargo Joint Venture in Atlanta and Import bookings were managed by Delta Cargo’s GSSA Air France in Paris, France.

“Since our initial online offerings were managed by three different sources, delivery options for various customers were fragmented,” explains Robin Stricklin, Manager of Marketing Communications, e-Commerce, at Delta Cargo. “The biggest challenge was dealing with two different booking platforms based on three independent operating systems. Customers had to choose the right portal to suit their booking.”

She says, “Customers could book freight, general freight and short haul express items, through Descartes GF-X Exchange, but we only offered limited origins and destinations based on our key hubs in the U.S. There wasn’t even a full route offering for each origin/destination, so it was all very piecemeal.”

Less than a quarter of domestic customers were using the online portal; the rest were calling the Delta Cargo call centre to make their bookings. Based on the success of online passenger reservations, Delta Cargo executives recognized there were economies of scale in using e-commerce for cargo bookings.

According to Stacy Brockwell, e-Commerce Program Manager at Delta Cargo, “One of our prime goals was to shift the service delivery channel to reduce the cost per booking. A call center booking costs us about 40% more than online service delivery, and at the time only 25% of our customers were making electronic cargo bookings. In addition, our call center was only open during business hours and customers sometimes had to face long wait times. It made sense to offer a variety of online booking features through a single, integrated solution.”

Delta Cargo began exploring its options for migrating to a comprehensive solution that could leverage and consolidate database resources, strengthen its online capabilities, and streamline the booking process for its customers.
As a member of the Descartes GF-X Exchange, Delta Cargo had the option to implement Descartes’ private label cargo booking solution. “We did look at other solutions, but given our successful partnership with Descartes, we chose to extend that relationship and roll out the private label version of GF-X Exchange. It made sense – the look and feel would be the same, and the multi-platform issues would be addressed,” says Brockwell."

**Extending Electronic Bookings to a Global Market with Descartes**

In the spring of 2008, Delta Cargo clients began using an enhanced version of Descartes GF-X Exchange for both U.S.-based and international cargo bookings. At the same time, Delta Cargo went live with Descartes CargoBooker, providing small freight forwarders with the ability to make ad hoc bookings with Delta. Using either solution allowed Delta Cargo customers to access information for multiple carriers, make electronic bookings for global shipments, and track shipments 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, via a simple Web browser and single login process. Users also had the ability to book special shipments that they could previously only do through the call centre.

In the fall, Delta went live with the Descartes private label solution, which enables users around the world to book cargo through the DeltaCargo.com web site, make freight allocations and query their shipment needs. The system responds with electronic confirmation when a reservation is made. In addition, shippers have access to over 50 pages of static content. All of their questions can be answered at a single location.

“While other carriers deployed Descartes’ private label solution from the ground up, we were the first to implement it using an existing online booking solution as a base. Our combined teams at Delta, Delta Technology and Descartes did a great job anticipating our needs. Descartes has supported us every step of the way through execution,” explains Stricklin.

**Summary**

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<th>Challenge:</th>
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<td>Delta Cargo was using three disparate solutions to enable online cargo bookings. To bring more customers online, the carrier needed to offer a variety of online booking features through a single, integrated solution.</td>
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<th>Solution:</th>
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<td>As an existing Descartes GF-X Exchange user, Delta Cargo made the decision to implement Descartes’ private label solution as well as its CargoBooker application. The look and feel would be the same across all three solutions and the multi-platform issues would be addressed.</td>
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<th>Benefits:</th>
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| • One-stop shopping support for import/export, national and international customers  
• Ease of use translates into more online bookings and lower operational costs  
• Changes made are simultaneously updated in all three booking systems  
• Short term goal is for 50% of total transactions to be processed online  
• Call center agents can now focus on processing more complex transactions  
• Delta Cargo is better prepared to tackle the integration of Northwest Airlines’ cargo systems |