



STA Travel Goes the Distance by Outsourcing its Hosting Infrastructure to Savvis

Overview

Founded in 1979, STA Travel is the largest student travel organization in the world, currently serving more than 6 million customers. From its roots as a small Australian travel agency, STA Travel has grown to a global enterprise that offers price-conscious travellers an extensive array of services. In addition to budget air and train tickets, STA Travel offers booking services for accommodations, tours and work, study and volunteer programs. It also provides ancillary services such as shopping discount cards, travel insurance, online visa applications and discount cell phone services.

In addition to hundreds of retail locations scattered around the world, STA Travel operates a number of call centers and a sophisticated Web site that allows customers to book their travel, receive customer support and research travel options online. More recently, STA Travel has created an interactive social community in which its customers can post stories and questions and interact with each other no matter where they are located in the world.

Challenge

Prior to 2003, STA Travel had a decentralized IT strategy in which each one of the five regions the company operated in controlled its own IT strategy and operations. Because each regional business unit took a slightly different approach to IT – with some hosting their own data centers, others outsourcing them, and others subscribing to a hybrid model of operating – the end result was a very fragmented IT organization that wasn't aligned with the company's strategic vision.

Cost was also an issue. "We couldn't afford to have five different systems all trying to do the same thing," said Andy Mills, CIO at STA Travel. "Back in 2001, many businesses opted to go with an in-house solution, but we realized we were entering a more sophisticated world," said Mills. "We absolutely needed economies of scale that we would get from a global Tier 1 service provider," said Mills. Additionally, STA Travel chose to outsource its IT infrastructure so it could reallocate its internal resources away from the day-to-day management of infrastructure components to projects that added real value.

Company:

STA Travel

Line of Business:

Provide a broad range of travel-related services targeted at young adults and students

Target Market:

Young adults and Student travelers from virtually every country in the world

Location:

Group Headquarters in London, UK, with worldwide operations

Summary:

STA Travel, the world's largest student travel organization, had a decentralized IT strategy in which each regional business unit took responsibility for its own IT operations. STA Travel chose Savvis to provide managed hosting, to support its mission-critical systems. Today, STA Travel has a scalable, cost-effective and reliable IT foundation that it can depend upon in managing its operations around the world.



Solution

STA took its time choosing a vendor, carefully evaluating some of the leading managed services providers in the world. It had several non-negotiable requirements. First, the vendor had to have a global reach; secondly, it had to offer high reliability so STA Travel could trust it with its most important internal and customer-facing applications. Finally, it had to be scalable enough to allow STA Travel to continue growing.

“It was a huge relief to have Savvis on board. Knowing that we had a solid IT infrastructure gave me one less thing to worry about at night. Savvis solutions work”

**- Andy Mills
CIO at STA Travel**

Today, STA Travel depends on Savvis to host its IT infrastructure and global network. This infrastructure supports STA Travel's most important business, operational and customer-facing applications, including its global online transaction engine that drives its business; its offline transaction systems; its management information platform; and its finance systems. “Nearly everything that our business depends on is being hosted in Savvis' data centers,” said Mills. “Savvis is the foundation on which our business runs.”

Benefits

Moving to a centralized application environment was not without its challenges. “We had tried a number of times to globally consolidate our applications but had not succeeded in bringing it all together,” said Mills, who was hired in 2005 to drive the project to a successful completion. Savvis had already been selected as the outsourcing vendor and being able to depend upon Savvis as he worked with various applications vendors and developers was critical for Mills' ability to finally realize STA Travel's vision of globally unified application architecture. “It was a huge relief to have Savvis on board,” said Mills. “Knowing that we had a solid IT infrastructure gave me one less thing to worry about at night.” When referencing that reliability, Mills said simply, “Savvis' solutions work.”

One of the biggest value-added solutions that Savvis has provided to STA Travel is its managed Oracle database service, where Savvis handles all aspects of managing STA Travel's Oracle database, from licensing, to installing, patching, and upgrading the software. “Savvis has provided us with absolutely critical assistance with our Oracle installation,” continued Mills.

Savvis also provided “fantastic” support in other ways, said Mills. “If there is a problem, they are completely responsive, open, and honest. We truly value the relationship we've built with them over the years,” said Mills.

The Future

In the future, STA Travel hopes to take advantage of Savvis' increased offerings of virtualized cloud-based solutions to realize even greater scalability. “We look forward to the day when we can simply turn infrastructure capacity on and off as we need it,” said Mills.

**For more information
about Savvis, visit
www.savvis.net or
call 1.800.SAVVIS.1
(1.800.728.8471).**

EMEA
Savvis UK Limited
Tel +44 (0)118 322 6000

ASIA PACIFIC
Savvis Singapore
Company Pte Ltd
Tel +65 6768 8000

JAPAN
Savvis Communications K.K.
Tel +81.3.5214.0151