

Avis Europe improves business flexibility and delivers new online services for customers with Verastream



Avis Europe is one of the world's leading car hire firms, with annual revenue of over 1 billion. The car rental market is highly competitive, and the company is intent on maintaining its position at the front of the race.

Responding to competitive pressures

Over recent years, competition has intensified with the entrance of brokers and intermediaries. Internet reservations have increased dramatically, and there is strong price competition, as customers can quickly and easily compare the prices of different operators online before booking.

Against this background, Avis Europe is constantly looking for ways to become more customer focused and flexible in the market. It wanted to improve the range of services available via its web site, to make the process of renting cars easier for its customers. In addition, the company wanted to be able to change its prices more quickly in response to new competitive pressures and introduce short-term, regional offers to take advantage of opportunities, such as major sporting events.

However, to achieve these goals, Avis Europe needed to invest further in IT. All of the company's customer and pricing information is stored on a mainframe system called Wizard, owned and operated by the company's sister company, Avis Inc, in the USA. This mainframe system has served the company well for many years, but its 'green screens' are not very user-friendly, and employees need lengthy training.

Up and running in less than a month

Avis Europe needed an immediate solution that would give it improved access to both financial and customer data in the central mainframe system. It conducted a thorough search of suitable products on the market and selected Attachmate's Verastream® solution.

"Attachmate really stood out," says Paul Brough, a business systems analyst at Avis Europe. "We were up and running with Verastream in less than a month – and that included all of the initial application development and training."

QUICK VIEW

Problem

Avis Europe wanted to further improve its access to financial and customer information, to help it respond more quickly to market changes and deliver new customer services. Specifically, it wanted to be able to implement price changes more quickly and expand online services for customers.

Solution

The company uses Verastream to gain rapid access to information stored on its central mainframe system. It has built a range of new business applications, including solutions to:

- Implement new pricing models across 3,700 rental stations in 75% less time.
- Provide customers with access to account information in real-time via the web site.

Benefits

- Improved services for customers.
- Faster and more efficient responses to new business drivers and competitive pressures.
- Greater flexibility and speed when implementing new business solutions.
- Increased value from existing investment in mainframe technology.

The solution was initially put to use in the financial department to give users faster access to large volumes of data from its general ledger system. This, however, was just the beginning. "As soon as we had Verastream on board, and had discovered how easy it is to use, there was significant interest from many different business areas," says Brough. Since the initial introduction of Verastream into the business, the solution has been used to deliver two important new business improvement projects.

Exchanging data in 75% less time

The first of these projects took place in the revenue management department. Avis

Europe has over 3,700 rental stations and, when new pricing models were introduced in the past, it used to take a long time to distribute the new rates, terms and conditions to each individual location. "Our mainframe systems were very complex and sometimes time-consuming to update," explains Brough. "As a result, it could often take several days before all our rental stations were ready to start using the new rates."

To speed up this process, Avis Europe now uses Verastream to upload information on new pricing models from a local application to the central mainframe. From here, the new pricing information is instantly available to all rental locations in all countries. In addition, Avis Europe uses Verastream to verify that the information on terms and conditions relating to pricing offers in the central mainframe is correct and consistent across countries.

"We can now change prices across all our locations in less than one quarter of the time," says Christian Clausen, a technical team leader in the revenue management department of Avis Europe. "This has had a huge impact on the business. We can match competitive prices and reflect changes in demand quickly and effectively."

By using a local application for revenue management, Avis Europe has been able to introduce new features that were not possible on the mainframe. For example, Avis Europe has been able to improve security around sensitive pricing information, as well as introduce an audit trail for the first time.

Delivering new services for customers

The second business improvement project relates to the new UK web site.

Avis Europe operates a loyalty card scheme for frequent customers called Avis Preferred. After customers have made their initial registration, the service stores information such as their driver licence number and address. Then, whenever a Preferred member books a vehicle online, he or she can go direct to the vehicle to collect it, rather than having to queue and sign paperwork at the Avis Europe desk. This is a very important service for Avis Europe as it helps the company to deliver a more efficient service for customers and strengthen brand loyalty.

Avis Europe wanted to give customers the ability to update their Preferred profiles online. It therefore used Verastream to create a link between its new UK website and the central mainframe system, where global customer information is held. When customers access the web site, Verastream retrieves information about Preferred cardholders, in real-time, and then manages subsequent updates back to the mainframe afterwards.

"Customers can now view and update their own details themselves, including credit card and billing information," explains Brough. "This wasn't possible on our web site before we introduced Verastream. Instead, customers had to telephone or visit a rental station to update their details. We can now offer a much better online service for our customers."

Offering lots of potential for the future

For Avis Europe, one of the most important benefits of Verastream is its flexibility. In addition to the applications described above, the company has discovered that Verastream can add value in many different ways. The solution has been used in the IT Service desk department to allow staff to carry out bulk updates to access rights for terminals and printers.

In the future, the company foresees that Verastream will be able to deliver 'quick win' benefits in other parts of the business too. For example, it plans to use Verastream to help it access information to process parking fines more easily.

Avis Europe has been impressed by how easy it is to create new applications. After just half a day of instruction, members of the IT application teams were able to build a fairly complex set of procedures for accessing information via Verastream. "We can develop interfaces quickly and with a relatively small amount of training," says Brough.

He concludes: "Verastream gives us access to a huge amount of data that we otherwise couldn't get to in real time. It enables us to speed up multiple transactions and ultimately increase the value that we gain from our existing mainframe system."



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- Paul Brough
Business Systems Analyst
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