

THALYS WI-FI KEEPS TRAIN PASSENGERS CONNECTED

Passengers onboard Thalys international high-speed trains can now access the Internet.

CASE STUDY

Client:

Thalys International

Challenge:

Provide passengers with Internet access onboard high-speed trains.

Solution:

CSC worked with Thalys to determine requirements, select the best providers, and test and rollout the Internet access.

Results:

Thalys International has launched the first commercial Internet access service on board high-speed trains.

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Thalys International operates high-speed passenger trains between Paris, Brussels, Cologne and Amsterdam. The company faces fierce competition from the airlines on these international routes, which cater to business travelers. Thalys needed to provide a premium service to win new market share, and determined that broadband Internet access on its high-speed trains would fulfill a growing customer demand.

In April, Thalys rolled out the first commercial Internet access service onboard its international high-speed trains, using Wi-Fi and satellite technologies to cover its four-country network.

"It will be one of the services that make a real difference," says Jean-Michel Dancoisne, managing director of Thalys International. CSC worked with Thalys to determine requirements, identify the best technologies and providers, and assist with testing and successful rollout.

"We quickly established a very close working relationship between CSC and Thalys, and this explains the success of the project. This climate of trust enabled us never to evade problems and to work together on finding the solutions," says Dancoisne.

For their work, CSC employees Cécile Anglada, Anne-Sophie LeFeuvre, Patrick Sautin and Gilles Viennois received the 2008 Chairman's Award (formerly Award for Technical



Excellence), CSC's top honor for innovation from the Leading Edge Forum.

Experimenting in 2005

The project is the end result of studies originally launched in 2005. At the time, European company 21Net, with the support of the European Space Agency, developed a prototype that demonstrated both the feasibility of the proposed initiative and the high level of public interest in the service. 21Net's solution combined Wi-Fi inside the train with a satellite Internet connection capable of adapting to widely fluctuating transmission conditions, given the speed of the trains. The positive results of this early experiment encouraged Thalys to envision a large-scale rollout.

In July 2006, Thalys enlisted CSC to help finalize the request for proposal (RFP) that Thalys would be sending out. Thalys wanted its Internet system to be set up similar to its concession system for other onboard services: The operator is responsible for technical rollout of the solution and commercial operation in compliance with Thalys's specifications. After drafting the RFP,

CASE STUDY

THALYS WI-FI KEEPS TRAIN PASSENGERS CONNECTED (CONT.)



Recipient of the 2008 Chairman's Award for Excellence

Thalys asked CSC to provide support for this complex project.

"It was a transversal project requiring sophisticated expertise in railways and telecomm, with a strong international dimension and the need for the final solution to meet very high customer quality expectations," says Dancoisne.

A small, highly responsive team

CSC was chosen for its industry expertise and its experience in steering projects involving the introduction of new technologies. The team set up immediately was deliberately kept small – three CSC consultants and three people from Thalys.

"Faced with a project that still had numerous areas of uncertainty, our idea was to have a small, multidisciplinary and very responsive team," explains Stéphane Berthier, partner in charge of CSC's Transport and Tourism division in France.

The team's first task was to analyze the submitted proposals while fine-tuning the economic model of the future service. Reflecting its concern with customer satisfaction, Thalys wanted to offer free Internet access to its "Comfort 1" passengers and give "Comfort 2" passengers the possibility of paying for access.

Finally, in September 2007, Thalys and CSC selected a consortium bringing together Nokia-Siemens, 21Net and Telenet. "The satellite-based solution

was not the only option to be looked at, but it turned out to be the one most suited to our needs," says Dancoisne.

Trust, the key to success

The next stage consisted of developing an operating prototype, a crucial phase in which everyone demonstrated great determination to overcome obstacles and bring the project to fruition. The consortium responsible for technical development mobilized a team of up to 50 people, while the Thalys/CSC team worked on several projects at the same time: defining optimal service levels (SLAs), designing the access portal for users and obtaining the necessary authorizations from the rail transport regulators in each of the countries concerned.

At the end of January 2008, the final adjustments were made to the prototype, paving the way for fully installing the system in 26 Thalys trains. This phase also provided the opportunity to ensure that the customer support satisfied the level of quality that would be required by Thalys's demanding clientele (for example, a hotline, onboard information, and crew training).

With the successful commercial launch of the service in the spring of 2008, Internet access is bound to become one of the most popular onboard services at the launch of Thalys's Paris-Amsterdam and Paris-Cologne high-speed lines in 2009.