

# Zetron Deploys New 200-Position Comm System for Delta Air Lines

## *Zetron's Acom Equips Delta's Expanding Ops Control Center*



When you're the largest airline in the world, you have countless numbers of people, tasks and operations to manage, coordinate and control. But that's not all. Given the extent to which the effects of a single glitch can ripple throughout your system, you have to be able to respond nimbly, effectively and at the drop of a hat.

These are the reasons Delta Air Lines recently obtained and deployed a 200-position Zetron Advanced Communications (Acom) System in its Operations Control Center (OCC) in Atlanta, Georgia. They needed a system that could support the broad scope and scale of Delta's operations, which were expanding even further to accommodate an influx of personnel from recently acquired Northwest Airlines. They also needed a system that would be rock-solid reliable, able to adapt to their unique needs, and could be deployed on the tight deadline required to be ready when former Northwest employees arrived at the OCC.

The Acom system that went fully live in March of 2010 was chosen for its ability to meet all of these requirements. And from all accounts, it is performing just as the customer had hoped it would

### **From crop-duster to world's largest airline**

Delta Airlines, which began under another name as an aerial crop-dusting company in 1924, is currently the largest airline in the world. Headquartered in Atlanta, Delta serves more than 160 million customers per year, offers more than 13,000 flights daily, and provides service to 564 destinations in 112 countries on six continents. It has

hubs in Amsterdam, Atlanta, Cincinnati, Detroit, Memphis, Minneapolis-St. Paul, New York-JFK, Paris-Charles de Gaulle, Salt Lake City and Tokyo-Narita.

### **The center point**

Delta's OCC is the central point through which all of the airline's operations are managed. This includes the airline's flights, maintenance and schedules, and any situations that arise to affect them.

"We are the tactical operations of the airline," says David Burton, Delta Air Lines Manager of Operations Control, Technology Services. "We run the flights, schedules, crews, and all aspects of a flight on the day of the operation as well as the day before. We manage all of the maintenance and make sure the flight crews and passengers get where they need to be."

"We also have to respond daily to the full range of changes and challenges an airline has to deal with," Burton continues. "This includes factors as diverse and dynamic as weather, regulations, air traffic, security events, fuel prices, plane maintenance and repair issues, and even volcanic ash that might be affecting routes we fly through. We have to ensure that we provide the product that the airline is selling to the customer."

### **Why a new communication system?**

The main driver behind the need for a new communication system in Delta's OCC was the growth that would result from the purchase of Northwest Airlines and the expansion of the OCC this would necessitate.

“We liked the system we’d been using, but it couldn’t scale beyond the capacity at which we were already running it,” explains Burton. “It would be woefully inadequate to work for us as we needed it to, given the merger with Northwest Airlines.”

### Acom meets the criteria

Burton says that a thorough product analysis was undertaken to determine which communications system would best meet their needs. From this process, it soon became clear that Zetron’s Acom was the system that most closely matched what they needed.

“Once we started looking at different systems, we decided Acom was the one that best met our criteria,” he says. “It had the most industry experience, as well as the capacity to handle the scale we needed. It would also be able to interface with our existing radio dispatch consoles, radios and PBX equipment. Another plus was that the former Northwest employees had been using an Acom system at their previous communications center, and they had enjoyed using it very much. Because they were already dealing with a huge amount of upheaval and change, we wanted to mitigate this to the extent that we could. Their familiarity with the system would help ease their transition to our OCC somewhat.”

Burton says that yet another winning point was Zetron’s willingness and ability to provide the technical expertise necessary to adapt the system to meet Delta’s unique requirements and extremely tight deadlines, despite the complexity of the project.

### Phase I and Phase II

The system implementation was conducted in two phases. Phase I involved demolishing and reconstructing Delta’s OCC, installing about half of the Acom positions, and then populating them with former Northwest Airlines employees. The OCC’s veteran operators were temporarily moved to the OCC backup center, where they used the legacy equipment to keep operations running during this phase of the deployment.

Phase II involved implementing most of the remaining consoles, and then moving Delta’s veteran operators from their legacy system to the new Acom system. Zetron also provided extensive operator training as part of Phase II. At the end of Phase II, 188 positions were active; the remainder would be phased in over time.

### Overcoming challenges

Although the project posed some technical challenges, Burton says these were all addressed successfully, thanks to Acom’s flexibility and Zetron’s and Delta’s engineers’ skill and determination to provide what the customer needed and the situation required. “Integrating our existing PBX into the Acom system was an incredible engineering feat,” he says. “Our PBX is so large that no one could have foreseen the challenge this would pose. Zetron’s engineering team deserves kudos for their ability, persistence and determination to do what was necessary to make the system work.”

### Results

Delta’s new Acom system is now delivering the functionality, reliability and expanded capabilities the airline was seeking.

“The Acom system provides a more modern user interface and more capabilities than our legacy system,” says Burton. “It has a really nice, customizable GUI. We’ve gotten a lot of compliments about the screen design. We also make extensive use of the Web-dial feature. It consists of Web pages that are set up with speed-dial functionality. You touch a button or hotspot, and it dials your phone.”

“Since overcoming some initial technical hurdles, the Acom system has been extremely rock solid and reliable,” Burton continues. “Zetron was absolutely spot-on in supporting and staying with us and being very dedicated until every little issue that came up was resolved. I’ve got nothing but high praise for them. In addition to everything else, the system was delivered on an incredibly tight deadline. Zetron did a terrific job.” ■



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