



Cathay Pacific's "Learners World" Takes Off With NetDimensions

For Cathay Pacific Airways, the move to e-learning is part of a cultural shift. Passive participation is out. Initiative is in. For Learners World this means enabling employees to control their own destiny.

Cathay Pacific Airways is known for its leadership in the adoption of new technologies. The airline was the first in the world to announce plans to install in-flight e-mail, the first to link its Airbus aircraft to its maintenance centers electronically, and the first in the world to auction air tickets online.

Recently, Cathay Pacific announced an investment of over US\$250 million in e-business, part of its plan to become Asia's leading e-business airline. A key element in this strategy was the development of a company-wide e-learning environment that Cathay Pacific calls Learners World.

Graham Higgins, manager of Cathay Pacific's learning & development group, is in charge of coordinating all of Cathay Pacific's training programs. He was responsible for choosing NetDimensions' Enterprise Knowledge Platform (EKP) as the airline's learning management system, the backbone of Learners World.

Learners as customers

"When I arrived at Cathay Pacific in 1999 the airline was looking at the big players in the e-learning space and had been investigating learning management systems for some time," Higgins says. "At the end of 1999 I assumed responsibility for developing our e-learning infrastructure and took the position that we needed to treat our learners—our employees—as customers."



Graham Higgins, manager of Cathay Pacific's learning & development group

"We needed to give them choice, control and the ability to tailor the learning process to their own needs. At the outset, the proposals I had seen did not offer a great deal in the way of customization, nor did the companies show the kind of responsive and flexible attitude that I was looking for. Then I came across NetDimensions and their Enterprise Knowledge Platform."

EKP is designed to manage the entire learning process—from enrolling students and tracking their progress, to delivering tests and reporting costs. A scaleable, Web-based solution, EKP operates securely and reliably in any language.

"We chose NetDimensions for their flexibility—flexibility in terms of both their attitude and their software. The software is easy to customize and to upgrade. It is based on an open systems architecture, making it simple to break open the box and integrate it with other systems."

"We also found that NetDimensions has a flexible approach to customization, which was refreshing after the 'we know best' attitude we had encountered with so many other vendors."

Empowering employees

Cathay Pacific selected NetDimensions' solution, and then the hard work began.

Higgins says he had eight internal customers—eight physical training centers—each focused on specific groups of learners and learning processes. The Cathay Pacific and NetDimensions teams had to figure out how to adapt the airline's real-world training environment to the online training model.

"One good example of this is how we now keep office staff familiar with the airport layout so that, if we have to pull them in to help with an emergency, incident or disruption, they will know their way around. We have created a virtual tour using 3D imagery so that a learner can refresh their memory by virtually walking through the restricted and non-restricted areas of the airport."

Cathay Pacific Airways

49 destinations • 29 countries • 14,000+ people • 35 nationalities • One LMS

Of course the fundamental challenge was to get employees to start using the e-learning system. While Cathay Pacific could simply make it compulsory to take certain courses, Higgins' team wanted people to get onto the system of their own accord.

"We had already learned from the introduction of our corporate intranet that we needed to offer things that would interest people. For example, we created an online travel desk where staff can enter their comments on hotels they have stayed in. This proved very popular because so many of our staff travel frequently. We also introduced online registration for some very popular lunchtime auditorium sessions that we run. So, for example, if you wanted to attend the session on managing your personal finances, you could sign up for it via Learners World."

"Whatever we did had to represent an improvement over the existing way of doing things. More choice for the staff, greater convenience, more independent control over their career development. All of these were factors in attracting our staff to use Learners World."

The proof that this has worked?

"The majority of enrolments are by individuals rather than by training centers or line managers," says Higgins.

Implementing EKP was just the first step for Cathay Pacific in leveraging its internal network and empowering its employees through e-business.

"Implementing EKP was the easy part," says Higgins. "Now we are looking at personalization issues and seeking collaboration from training managers on course content and methodology. And we want to see employees taking charge of the learning process, driving their careers forward and improving the service they offer our customers."

Saving one week in six

Higgins adds, "We've also moved far enough along to be able to start answering questions from the board about how many dollars and training days EKP has saved us. That's an important focus."



How much has EKP saved Cathay Pacific, even at this early stage? As an example, the airline has saved one full week from its previously six-week cabin crew orientation program, resulting in significant savings in

direct and indirect costs. Higgins warns, though, "To get to that point we have had to do a lot of hard work."

In addition, some surprising areas of training have been entirely converted to e-learning. When a new reclining seat was introduced in business class, Cathay Pacific decided not to summon its 300 maintenance technicians back to the classroom for training. Instead the technicians, who are scattered around Cathay Pacific's 49 flight destinations, were introduced to the new seat via an online self-teaching module.

"This worked well, especially given that we were dealing with a large number of dispersed trainees. And of course the online module is now available at any time for anyone who wants a refresher. We also created Tutor Online, a facility that offers e-mail support with a 24-hour response time. We have found this particularly effective as a follow-up to online or classroom events."

Continual innovation

The working relationship between NetDimensions and Cathay Pacific is a close one, which allows NetDimensions to develop state-of-the-art solutions that address and anticipate Cathay Pacific's needs.



For example, Cathay Pacific required an easy way for learners to see and access all the materials and activities relating to a particular course. NetDimensions responded by developing the Knowledge Center. This gives a unified view of everything related to the course that the learner has selected, be it course documentation, virtual classroom events and live training sessions, news articles, discussion groups and message boards, audio and video material, skills evaluation and certification testing, or links to the other students who are enrolled in the course.

"NetDimensions promised me two technical breakthroughs a year," says Higgins. "Not upgrades, but continual innovation. EKP's open architecture allows relatively easy system redesigns, and we think of the development process now as continuous."

Says NetDimensions' Technical and Client Services Director, Gideon Sheps, "Our close relationship has allowed NetDimensions to learn from Cathay Pacific, and we are applying those lessons throughout our business. We are still learning every day, as Cathay Pacific's users come to grips with the system and demand more from it."