

SkyTech Solutions bridges gap between old and new systems

When the U.S. government decreed that daylight savings time would start three weeks early this year, those among us who are not “morning persons” felt the pain. So did some airlines.

Many airlines are built on legacy systems that hiccup when they are thrown an unexpected curveball; remember the Y2K crisis?

SkyTech Solutions was one of the companies that stepped into the

In Focus

breach and came up with a solution to prevent a scheduling crisis.

Based in Chicago, the company has three offshore development centers in Kolkata, Mumbai and Chennai, India. The Chennai location, which opened in January, houses SkyTech’s “TPF Center of Excellence,” which focuses on development and maintenance of TPF-based passenger services systems.

“When I look out there, there are still quite a few airlines – and beyond airlines, there are hotels, Amtrak, financial institutions – that still run on TPF systems,” Ken Kicia, vice president of sales for SkyTech.

“There will always be a demand for people who know TPF to deal with the unknowns that come up. Supporting mainframes is a growing area for SkyTech.”

Over time, airlines will move to open systems, but “when we talk to clients, one of the biggest challenges they face is that their mainframe technicians are getting ready for retirement,” he said.

But that is just a part of what SkyTech does. The company offers a range of passenger solutions: sales and marketing, distribution, reservations and loyalty program technology.

“We have built several different applications that tie into the GDSs, like PNR parsing and airline messaging,” Kicia said.

“We have very deep expertise, with a lot of depth and breadth in our staff.”

That expertise didn’t come out of nowhere. SkyTech was founded in 1999 by United Airlines and is incorporated as a joint venture between United and The Chatterjee Group, a U.S.-based investment firm.

One of the biggest drivers in the decision to open the TPF Center was United’s decision to migrate from Apollo to the new Star Alliance platform based on Amadeus Altéa.



United wanted to ensure that Apollo would be supported in the intervening years.

“United is by far our largest client,” Kicia said. “My goal is to grow the business outside of United.”

Among the “outside” projects is an employee travel portal developed for US Airways before it was acquired by America West.

“Before, employees had to call the airline reservations center to book travel,” Kicia said. “We developed a Web site that ties into the reservations and employee systems. Employees can go onto the Web



Ken Kicia

site to book without tying up call center agents.”

After the merger, America West asked SkyTech to modify the system so that both sides of the merged carrier could use it.

SkyTech also has developed a frequent flyer program that a small to midsized carrier could use “out of the box.” It is a stand-alone system that ties in with back-end systems to handle a wide range of frequent flyer program needs: reporting capabilities, a rules engine and various components that deal with mileage accrual, purchase and transfer, as well as miles associated with program partners.

SkyTech has a cadre of program managers who help define new solutions and translate from the functional to the technical view, Kicia said.

“About 20% of the effort will be onshore,” he said. “The offshore facilities allow us to deliver solutions in a cost-efficient way” — a necessity, given that “airlines always seem to have an appetite for IT projects that is larger than their budgets.”