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OAG®

THE VITALITY OF DATA:

HOW OTA'S AND METASEARCH BENEFIT FROM OAG

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Air travel is the business of motion at high speed, it is about making connections between people and places, and orchestrating smooth transfers despite disruption. It is a wellspring of data on flights, schedules, points of origin and destination, but it is not static. It is vibrant and variable.

As flight information has evolved from paper and analogue schedules to digital real-time data it has opened up new opportunities to capitalize on this information, helping to launch new businesses that allow more people to see the world than ever before.

Since 1929, OAG has been the trusted source on flight data, helping travel companies and individual travelers make sense of the complex business of flight. In this article OAG explains about the value of travel data today, and how metasearch companies, OTA's, and app developers are applying this data to make new travel services possible and offering a growing base of air travelers' greater options to see more of the world.
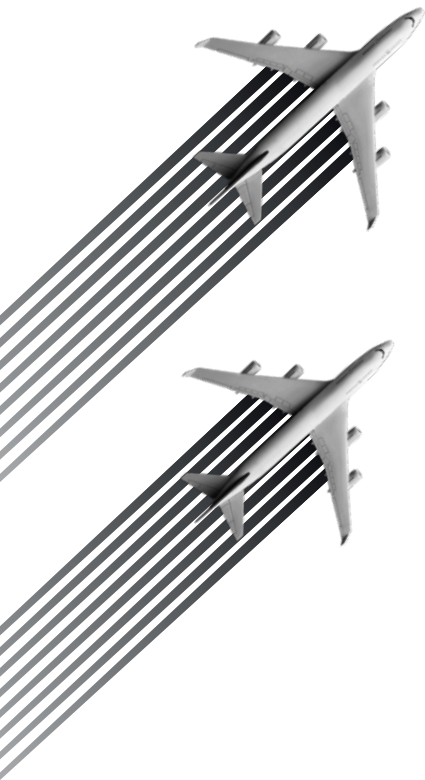
ALL GLOBAL FLIGHT DATA IN ONE PLACE

While flight data can be gathered from many different sources, OAG has made a business of enhancing and transforming it into smart data that paints a comprehensive and insightful picture of global flight activity.

To accomplish this OAG receives a range of data from airlines, airports, government and industry bodies via high quality feeds. By cleansing, validation and smart aggregation OAG then enriches the core data with additional data points, configured to suit each customer's use case and application.

All of this happens while keeping up with the rapidly changing nature of the original data sets. OAG handles over 4 million flight status updates, which include changes to any number of key data points (Tracked/Estimated/Gates/Terminals/Tails/Baggage) covering a particular flight and 120,000 schedule changes every day; and updates over 1,500 MCTs (minimum connection times) every week.

One of the challenges of reconciling this information is that airlines still use very different systems to transfer/communicate data, have different time frames and frequencies for updating their data, and use different file formats. Some send SSMs others use SSIM files, some use an OAG designed user interface or a direct connect API service, and in some cases a combination of methods.

This variety of data formats can lead to data point conflict, data gaps or duplication, but OAG's proprietary systems cleanse the complex data of more than 100 data sources, at multiple stages of the delivery process, and ensure its reliability.

The result is a global view of the skies, in real-time, historical or forecast, enhanced with information including seat configurations, terminals, locations, aircraft type and MCTs which can be delivered in a variety of formats suited to the customer's application daily, multiple times per day or real-time.

As Jodie Novotny, Head of Global Sales for Travel Technology, explains,

" Our data gives customers complete visibility on global schedules', whether it's a LCC or a ULCC or a mainline airline—hundreds of carriers that we work with. With our schedules, they're able to see the full picture, they're able to see all various options."

For example, OAG reconciles data on codeshare flights, removing duplication, ensuring operating carrier and codeshare carrier information is synchronized where appropriate – this can be a massive headache for airlines and the travel ecosystem as misaligned schedules data results in unnecessary time and cost wastage.

Jodie adds 'We have a vigorous and evolving data validation process to ensure the right information is being processed and we are regularly in dialogue with airlines to correct or update the inbound data "

This global picture helps OTA's and Metasearch companies and developers gain a competitive advantage by allowing the combination of data that best suits the end user—the traveler—and opening up new business models.

One example is in addressing traveler needs for reliable MCTs and codeshare information. One of the challenges around servicing codeshare flight data is synchronizing schedules of the airline that operates the flight or the airlines marketing the ticket. When the operator makes a schedule change, the codeshare partner will have to pick up the flight data. The notification may come from the partner airline or even directly from OAG. Without this reconciliation of MCT by OAG, there can be a gap in time when a ticket might be sold based on incorrect MCTs. The traveler might end up missing the adjusted connection or the airline or OTA may have to let the passenger know of the change and re-book the flight combination. When codeshares or MCTs are reconciled in a timely manner, the change process is seamless and invisible to the traveler which will result in greater passenger satisfaction.

But knowing connection times and the updated schedules and MCTs for the world's airlines and airports around the world also allows Metasearch companies, OTA's and app developers an opportunity to reach new customers who are interested in managing more of their own journey and making creative, sometimes more convenient and often cheaper, connections that aren't covered by codeshare and interline partnerships.
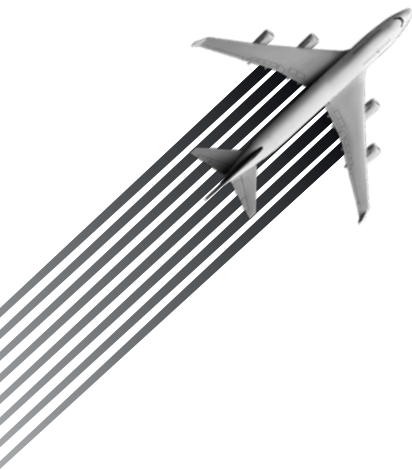
THE RISE OF SELF-CONNECTED TRAVEL

In their search for more convenient routes or cheaper fares, more passengers are willing to make their own connections through virtual interlining. A study conducted by OAG's flight tracking app flightview of more than 2,900 users found that:

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92%

92% of travelers are willing to self-connect under the right circumstances.

37%

37% of all travelers are willing to wait more than four hours on a layover in order to save $200. For millennials, that number jumps to 55%.

31%

31% of travelers are more likely to self-connect through a city they'd like to visit.

55%

55% of travelers cite missing a connecting flight and not being rebooked automatically by the airline as their top fear when self-connecting.

" Interline connections are great, but not everyone wants to do those. Some want to do more traveling on a budget and find the cheapest possible option. A lot of times that means building your own itinerary," Novotny explains.

This desire to make their own itinerary has helped create new business opportunities for travel technology companies like Dohop and Kiwi, OAG enables their users see the best available options.

Mayur (Mac) Patel, Regional Sales Director, JAPAC, at OAG sees this trend becoming particularly popular in Southeast Asia region.

"There are always passengers interested in self-connect," he says. "Whether it's LCC to mainline carriers, within Southeast Asia, or long-haul. Some of the things that stop them from doing so is that there is a risk of a missed connection.

" Increasingly, platforms are addressing this changing dynamic by providing insurance services on missed connections. This gives the traveler options to 'de-risk' the connection and provide comfort if something goes wrong on the day of operation. With the proliferation of LCCs and new routes opening on a regular basis in APAC, the opportunity for passengers to self-connect is growing rapidly."

To present all available options to travelers, Metasearch companies and OTA's need to have the flight data from LCCs as well as traditional carriers. If a company relies on GDS data alone, they will miss booking opportunities that would suit these resourceful travelers.

To address the needs of self-connected travelers, technology companies need to be sure that they have the freshest schedule information as well as a clear picture of minimum connection times at the world's airports—all information that OAG supplies.

MANAGING DISRUPTION/ PREDICTING CHANGE

Decades of historical data and a comprehensive view of today's airline business also helps OAG see into the future, enabling predictive analytics that can improve the service that travel technology companies offer their customers.

"We can predict whether there will be a delay or cancellation, even prior to booking. Our customers can offer their customers information on trends like on-time performance," Novotny says.

This helps consumers make more informed decisions that are not based on fares alone. For example, perhaps choosing a slightly more expensive ticket over a cheaper ticket that has a poorer track record of on-time performance will influence buyer behavior.

Having up-to-date information on flight alternatives can also help technology companies offer travelers solutions for irregular operations, highlighting the best flight alternative flights, for example, or suggesting alternative routings through airports that avoid weather or ATC congestion.

Services like Freebird, Lumos and Magnatech use OAG data solutions to give travelers vital insights that can improve their day of travel and help manage changes.

Freebird uses OAG schedules and real-time flight status updates to help travelers make quick flight rebookings on their mobile device when their itineraries change.

"When a flight gets canceled and there are 200 travelers looking for seats that are not available, getting to the front is critical. Freebird puts relevant options in front of travelers right away, which speeds the time to rebooking and reduces frustration and headache for all involved. We couldn't' do that without the reliable, real-time analytical solutions that OAG provides, which gives us the dynamic data we need – and fast," said Pete Harrison, Head of Marketing at Freebird.

Lumo uses OAG historical data and real-time schedule data to predict potential flight delays, even weeks in advance, helping travel companies manage disruption.

" Our number one priority is being accurate and quick about predictions. Internal models are only as good as the data that goes into them, which is why we rely heavily on OAG's data insights. OAG's platform is a dependable one-stop shop that tells us everything we need to know about the airspace. The better the data is, the better our predictions are, and the better we can serve customers," said Bala Chandran, Co-Founder and CEO of Lumos.

Magnatech Travel Management Solutions has developed a SafeToGo program which relies on OAG real-time schedule data to empowers TMCs (travel management companies) to manage unpredictable disruption. Real-time information on flight departures, groundings and arrivals helps TMCs track and locate travelers and satisfy duty-of-care obligations during hurricanes, earthquakes, political turmoil, and other critical security events.

" We deal with sensitive situations that need to be handled right away. We can't let even a few minutes go by before assessing and addressing the risks - everything needs to be handled at the time it's reported. Without OAG, we wouldn't be able to deliver this service and ensure traveler safety," said Delia Oviedo, Director of Mobile Technology at Magnatech.

THE DATA YOU NEED, WHEN YOU NEED IT

For travel technology startups the challenges of integrating flight data often come down to costs of acquisition.

As Ross Paterson, Director of Customer Success at OAG explains, the level of access to flight data and the quality of that data can limit growth.

" As we provide global flight information, both flight schedule and flight status, we provide the complete foundation to enable startups to accelerate and scale their business model. Other data sources for booking or fare information, such as GDSs, will charge fees based on search volumes which can generate significant costs at an early stage in development. We remove that pain point for customers, provide a faster response and reduce time and cost wastage."

Another consideration is that airline APIs may not include complete information on connections, which may force technology companies to reference GDS data, and again GDS data will be limited to the airlines represented by that platform.

"If you're creating a site where you want to give travelers the ultimate choice – everything that is really out there – we can deliver all of the flights and connections without any kind of bias," Paterson says.

Travel sites like MakeMyTrip and Traveloka help travelers put together their dream travel package itineraries including multi-modal transport, hotels or residences, and activities. They rely on OAG flight data to present customers the best combination of flights at attractive prices.

Because OAG offers comprehensive data with different plans, technology companies can make the data calls that they need without having to incur high call fees or allocate excessive data storage.

" You don't want to check hundreds of airlines if only 'a handful are operating a single route'," Paterson says.

DATA VALUE MULTIPLIED

Routehappy by ATPCO addresses the needs of airlines to present the value of their services to customers – travelers, distributors and OTA's – by presenting rich content and amenities. The company's Amenities API offers comprehensive and visual cabin experiential information including seat and aircraft type, cabin layout, Wi-Fi availability, entertainment options, in-seat power access, and food and beverage. This rich content allows airlines to compete on more than fares alone, helping boost airline yield and reputation.

OAG's flight data – delivered via a SSIM file – is seamlessly integrated with Routehappy's amenity insight to provide customers with the most up-to-date schedule information.

" OAG's SSIM data files are fundamental to what we offer. We couldn't offer the services we provide without having top-notch data," said Jason Rabinowitz, data research manager at Routehappy. "With more than 120,000 schedules changes a day, we have to keep up with the changes to make sure our rich content is a as relevant and it can be."

The accuracy and ease-of-integration of OAG data are a critical component of success for Routehappy.

"The breadth and flexibility of OAG's data enable us to add value by uncovering new insights for our customers," Rabinowitz added. "Our process would fall apart without the service OAG provides. We trust OAG to deliver reliable information, on-time, every time."

OAG helps the travel ecosystem keep step with the times, offering the world's only real-time airlines schedule data feed. The SSIM file supplied by OAG makes ingesting and integrating this data with value-added insights easy,

GROW INFORMED.

In travel, information isn't a luxury. It is a necessity. But information alone is not enough to ensure a successful journey. Travelers and the companies that serve them need reliable, actionable data in a format that is easy to review and apply. As the industry plans dramatic growth for the next 100 years, access to data you can bank on without breaking the bank is more important than ever before.

OAG reconciles reference data in different formats and different sources as it is filed, all the time validating location, airport, longitude and latitude, carrier codes and time zones, minimum connection times, and much more, for a complete picture of the skies.

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or email us on **contactus@oag.com**

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