

**REFINING CLIENT SERVICES WITH
WEB-BASED INNOVATION
AT GEORGIA'S PORTS**

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The Georgia Ports Authority

The Georgia Ports Authority (GPA) is a public corporation that acts as an agency of the State of Georgia. GPA owns and operates the Port of Savannah, the Port of Brunswick, the Bainbridge Inland Barge Terminal and the Columbus Inland Barge Terminal. Over 13 million tons of cargo are moved through GPA each year. Exports of raw materials, grains, forest products, automobiles and heavy machinery move smoothly through GPA. Major retailers such as Wal-Mart, Dollar Tree and Home Depot depend on GPA to move their imports quickly. All of the world's largest ocean carriers call the Port of Savannah.

The Port of Savannah is the largest single-terminal container facility on the U.S. East and Gulf coasts and ranks sixth among U.S. container ports. It is the fastest growing container port in the U.S. with container tonnage growing a record 31.5% over fiscal year 2003 to 1.5 million TEUs. Since 1995, total tonnage has increased by 60% and container operations have grown by a factor of 148%.

Introduction

GPA has worked diligently to promote globally the efficiencies, services and capabilities of Georgia's deepwater ports as productive, cost-effective conduits for international trade. The success of this marketing effort has

brought unprecedented growth to GPA. As with any industry, rapid growth in a container port brings many unique challenges. One such challenge faced by GPA was how to provide a high level of customer service and continue to meet increasing customer demands in a cost-effective manner. This was especially critical to GPA as they had distinguished themselves from the competition by their superior level of customer service.

Business Problem

GPA identified their Client Relations Center (CRC) and Gate Operations as two of the most critical areas for improving customer service. The problem facing GPA was twofold:

1. GPA had specific requirements to provide a higher level of customer service to differentiate their port and promote business growth, while controlling costs in their Client Relations Center, known as the CRC.
2. In order to meet growing demand, GPA must increase throughput capacity of their infrastructure and port facilities. This required a solution that would streamline operations to increase the movement of cargo between the dock and gate, while meeting customers' shipping requirements.

Background

Client Relations Center

The rapid growth at the ports had stretched the limits of GPA's Client Relations Center. The CRC's ten-person staff often found themselves handling a staggering 9600 calls per week! The CRC staff could not continue to handle this volume and still offer a high level of service to their customers.

A large number of the calls to the CRC were trouble transactions that were often time-consuming to resolve and resulted in delay at the gate for the customer. If GPA could minimize the number of trouble transactions, they could alleviate the stress on the CRC and improve truck turnaround time for the customer.

Gate Operations

Analysis of gate activity revealed that the majority of delays for the customer could be attributed to the following:

1. A booking was full.
2. Equipment type on the booking had changed.
3. Equipment had not been released for delivery.
4. Exports fell outside of GPA's normal window for receiving.

Any of these conditions would generate a trouble ticket for GPA's CRC and could cause significant delay for the drayman.

Objectives and Methodology

GPA recognized that the common factor in the demand on the CRC and the delay at the gate was inaccurate or out-dated data. Bad data invariably resulted in trouble transactions, causing delays and frustration for the customer and extra stress on the CRC. GPA realized that the most efficient solution was to empower the customers by providing each of them immediate and direct access to their own data, and looked to Web-based technology to provide an effective solution.

Software Solution

GPA evaluated and selected Navis's Web-based product, WebAccess, as a viable solution for their growing pains. WebAccess met GPA's requirements by providing customers direct access to their individual data while improving GPA's terminal operation productivity through a process called *pre-gating*.

Pre-gating is a critical function of WebAccess. It enables line operators, customhouse brokers, trucking companies, or terminal representatives to readily alert the terminal in advance of equipment being picked up or dropped off. Pre-gating expedites the gate process by enabling entry of most or all gate information before the dray arrives at the terminal. WebAccess validates a pre-gated equipment against a booking or a vessel visit. Problems can be identified and resolved beforehand, resulting in fewer

trouble transactions. For example, a trucker or agent can look up equipment availability online or receive a text message that equipment is ready for pick-up prior to arriving at GPA's terminal. This ensures that the equipment has been unloaded and is ready, yielding a quicker turn time for the drayman.

Pre-gating ensures that the transaction information has been pre-validated against the business rules in the system, and the terminal has been pre-alerted to position the equipment for speedy retrieval. Decreasing wait time allows the customer to gain higher utilization of his fleet and increases throughput for GPA.

WebAccess allows GPA customers to conduct transactions and update information directly from GPA's Web site. For example, U.S. Customs agents and shipping lines can set or release holds online, instead of calling GPA customer service to do so. The system then updates and reflects the correct equipment status in real time. Forwarders and brokers may create booking requests online or modify existing booking requests. Shippers can track the status of their goods and look up vessel voyages and cut off times. All users can create and run custom reports. With Internet accessibility, GPA customers are no longer tied to the CRC's operation hours. Customers now have immediate access to their data 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Project Cost

Implementing WebAccess required the purchase of a new server at a cost of \$5,000. Software implementation costs for WebAccess were \$194,000 with a \$23,340 annual maintenance fee, bringing the total cost of the project to \$222,340.

Performance Measures

Implementing WebAccess has allowed GPA to reduce service calls to the CRC by an astonishing 70%. GPA estimates that had the volume of service calls continued, they would have required a 50% increase in their ten-person CRC staff. By dramatically reducing the number of service calls, GPA has saved at least \$200,000 per year in CRC operational costs.

In addition to the savings in the CRC, reducing the number of trouble transactions through pre-gating has decreased truck turn time by 30% and increased GPA's throughput by 20%.

How WebAccess Fulfills the Award Criteria

Although GPA expected significant improvements in their customer service area, they were astounded by the dramatic decrease in service calls after implementation of WebAccess. With this technology, GPA is able to disseminate information efficiently, save the trucker time and money, and reduce operational costs.

Implementing a Web-based solution was the most cost-effective means of expanding today's technology to GPA's clients. GPA customers need nothing more than a Web browser to access their data; there is no software to install, no special equipment required, and no special configuration to the customer's systems. All that is required is the assignment of a login ID and password. Since the Web-based application is simple to use and navigation is straightforward, minimal training is all one needs.

Implementation costs for WebAccess were very small given the long-term savings in operational costs and increase in throughput for the terminal. While it is impossible to place a dollar value on customer satisfaction, there is no question that empowering one's customers and placing them in a proactive position greatly increases customer satisfaction. GPA has always ranked customer service high on their list of priorities, and WebAccess was

the best and most cost-effective means of continuing to provide quality service in a rapidly growing port.

The WebAccess solution is one that could be easily applied at any other port. It is based on standard and widely-available technology. The application is also highly configurable and scalable to reflect individual business rules and requirements.

Conclusion

GPA selected Navis's Web-based software product, WebAccess, to bring about improvements in their customer service while reducing operational costs. Implementation of WebAccess put the power of information directly in the hands of GPA's clients, drastically reducing the number of service calls to the CRC by an astonishing 70%. Additionally, utilizing WebAccess's pre-gating capability for transactions has eliminated many delays for the customer, reducing truck turn time by 30% and increasing efficiency in the movement of cargo between the dock and gate. With almost 80,000 trucks interchanged at GPA each month, the combined effect across all draymen is significant and one enthusiastically welcomed by both GPA and their clients.