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United, Amadeus collaborating to incorporate NDC standards

By Michael Baker

LOS ANGELES — United Airlines and Amadeus are collaborating on a merchandising strategy that will include implementation of IATA's New Distribution Capability (NDC), an Amadeus executive revealed.

Speaking here at a Global Business Travel Association event, Stewart Alvarez, Amadeus' vice president of commercial development and industry affairs, said the GDS operator is "working very closely" with United to expand its merchandising strategy and that the two "are working on implementing the IATA NDC XML communication standards to launch their product, hopefully sometime later this year."

An Amadeus spokesperson confirmed that the XML connectivity would be used in implementing the sale of Economy Plus premium seating, which the GDS announced earlier this year after signing a multiyear distribution deal with United.

The implementation of the standards, meant to create a common messaging platform for airlines to sell ancillaries and premium products across distribution platforms, would be among the first in the industry, though some airlines already have embarked on pilot programs to test the standards.

American Airlines, for example, started a pilot to show preferred seating when NDC was in its early stages, said George Khairallah, president of JR Technologies, which collaborated with American. That pilot project is testing additional functionality this year, he said.

JR Technologies also partnered with Air New Zealand to test the display and marketing of its Skycouch seating product, Khairallah added.

Jean-Charles Odele, director of financial and distribution services for IATA Americas, said the United/Amadeus collaboration was "great news for this industry that will bring a lot of benefits." Alluding to the contentious atmosphere that surrounded NDC when it first was announced — including travel buyers concerned about privacy issues and travel management companies concerned there had not been enough collaboration and trade input in the process — Odele said that it was a sign "we have now come from division to action."

He added that IATA would like to see more pilot projects using the standards, for which the association would be happy to "act as matchmaker."

This report originally appeared on July 29 in [The Beat](#), an e-newsletter produced by Business Travel News, a sister publication to Travel Weekly.

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