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New Farelogix ancillaries tool based on IATA's NDC standard

By Kate Rice

Farelogix, a key player in airlines' direct connect efforts to bypass GDSs, has just introduced NDC-Xpress, a product designed to help airlines sell their ancillary products and services through third parties, primarily the GDSs.

It's a way for airlines to implement features of IATA's New Distribution Capability (NDC) for selling ancillary products and services though the agency channel.

Fundamental to NDC is the airline industry's effort to standardize the XML messaging protocol for distributing airline ancillaries through third parties, making that process less complex and less expensive.

IATA's DDX (Distribution Data Exchange) Steering Group will release a candidate version of the NDC standard later this month. Others in the industry will then test and tweak that candidate version as part of the process of creating the official standard.

While that process unfolds, Farelogix is offering NDC-Xpress, an application programming interface that is essentially a pipe that provides access to an airline's content, which the airline can then deliver to a GDS or another third party, said Jim Davidson, president and CEO of Farelogix. Its purpose is to deliver content to third-party distributors, but the technology that it uses was originally built for direct connects.

While the official version of the XML standard remains a work in progress, Farelogix is confident in the candidate version it is using in NDC-Xpress.

"We don't care if it's offical or a candidate version, what we care about is that it is stable for a while," Davidson said. "We feel it's a very workable schema."

Industry analyst Henry Harteveldt said that development of the standard thus far appears to be firm enough for Farelogix to launch a new product.

"There's a saying in Silicon Valley: 'Done is better than perfect,'" Harteveldt said.
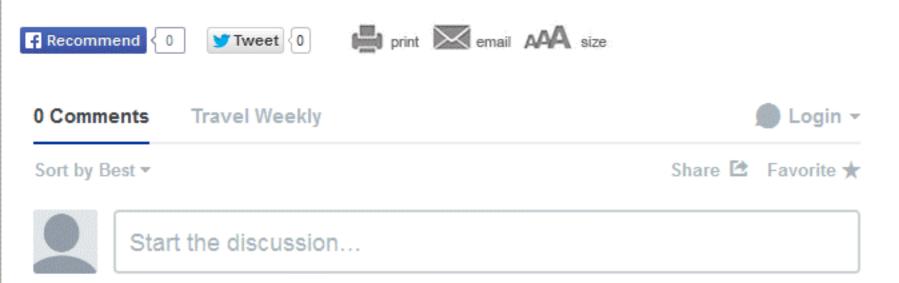
"Had there been more uncertainty or were there a longer timeline left on agreeing to the final specs, we wouldn't see Farelogix out there. They're not going to waste their time and money with something that has a strong likelihood of changing," Harteveldt said."

Still unknown is the type and amount of content that airlines will send through the pipe, should they elect to use it. Some airlines might deliver a la carte ancillaries, others might deliver fare families, for example. George Khairallah, president of JR Technologies and a member of the DDX group, said it's like a TV getting a variety of shows from mulitple channels that use the same communication standard even though they're delivering different content.

Khairallah added that there has been a change in attitude about NDC.

"More people are getting involved and seeing what these schemas look like and they're saying, 'I can use these with my airline,'" he said. Khairallah said that it was one thing for airlines to sign IATA Resolution 787, which laid the groundwork for NDC. "That was a big picture thing," he said. Now, with the candidate release of an an XML schema, "they're seeing it, they can touch it."

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