



## Customer Profile

Aer Lingus was founded by the Irish Government in April 1936 to provide air services to/from Ireland. The first flight, from Dublin to Bristol, took place on May 27th 1936. On October 2nd 2006, Aer Lingus entered a new phase in its history with the airline's floatation on the Irish and London Stock Exchanges, becoming a publicly quoted company and realising €400 million in equity for the airline's future growth.

In addition to revenue from low fares, Aer Lingus also generates revenue from sales of products and services that are ancillary to its core passenger operations, including: In-flight sales of merchandise, beverages and hot and cold meals Commissions from sales of car rentals Hotel accommodation and travel insurance sold through aerlingus.com Fees for passenger upgrades Access to airport lounges Commissions from online currency conversion Advertising in Aer Lingus' in-flight magazine "Cara" Aer Lingus' primary distribution channel is its website, [www.aerlingus.com](http://www.aerlingus.com). In 2010, around 85% of total passenger numbers was generated through this vital channel.

**Aer Lingus** 

## Aer Lingus flying high with mobile solution from Oxygen8

**Customer service enhancements at Aer Lingus are thanks to a sophisticated mobile solution from Oxygen8 Communications which allows it to keep customers fully up to date with the latest information about flight schedules, as well as a whole host of other services.**

Running a busy airline is never easy, given all of the factors that can throw a meticulously-timed schedule off course - from bad weather and extreme natural events, to operational issues. If this wasn't challenging enough, a difficult economic climate, carbon footprint concerns and the rising price of fuel have taken their toll on passenger numbers and company profits, intensifying the need for operators to run their fleets at superior levels of efficiency.

Irish airline Aer Lingus, which has a focus on cost control, prides itself on doing just that, and uses the latest technology to keep expenses low while maintaining high levels of customer service. Last year, the company, which employs 3,500 staff, and celebrates its 75th year of service in 2011, carried 9.3 million passengers on over 100 routes to 75 destinations in 22 countries across Europe and the US.

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**John Collins**

Information Systems Manager at Aer Lingus

### Personal service – without the cost

Aer Lingus' primary distribution channel is its website, [www.aerlingus.com](http://www.aerlingus.com). In 2010, around 85% of total passenger numbers was generated through this vital channel.

When a majority of bookings are made online, however, it can be difficult to develop close customer relationships and deliver differentiated customer service. In the event of a known delay or cancellation to a service, the airline can't rely on customers reading and acting on emails, especially if contact needs to be made at unsociable hours or when passengers are already on holiday or away on business. Yet, using call centre agents to let people know individually would be expensive and time-consuming.

To get round this problem, Aer Lingus has taken advantage of an innovative mobile solution from Oxygen8 Communications, which allows it to reliably contact customers promptly and at short notice with changes to schedules and other valuable service information.

The Oxygen8 text-based solution – an SMS gateway - is connected into the central Aer Lingus online booking engine, to provide opt-in passenger lists with timely SMS alerts on any flight delays, cancellations or service updates.

“The decision to use Oxygen8 stemmed from a need to be able to contact passengers in transit,” explains John Collins, Information Systems Manager at Aer Lingus. “A text-based service meant that we could reach opt-in passengers for a particular flight instantly, yet at very low cost.”

### Going the extra mile

Crucially, the Oxygen8 proposition is an end-to-end service, providing full visibility of whether a customer has received an incoming message. “The value-added information Oxygen8 can provide is critical,” Collins says. “They are able to monitor what happens to each message, so we can have full confidence that they are getting through. If there is ever an issue, Oxygen8 is back to us in minutes with a response.”

While other SMS options existed, Aer Lingus found that Oxygen8 was not only more cost-effective, but that it provided a level of reliability, operational support and added value that rival offerings couldn't match. Says Collins, “The breadth of countries Oxygen8 cover matched our route map entirely, and in the US, where it can be difficult and time-consuming when launching SMS programmes, Oxygen8 managed to overcome all obstacles and effectively deploy our solution, working within a strict regulatory environment as dictated by Tier 1 operators and facing varying technical challenges.”

### Taking the drama out of a crisis

Since Aer Lingus began using Oxygen8 text message services in early 2007, the solution has become an important tool for the airline. “Within 3-4 weeks of going live with the Oxygen8 mobile solution, we had a situation with a flight from Malaga where we needed the plane back early,” Collins recalls. “We had to notify passengers that they needed to be at the airport 60-90 minutes ahead of schedule. If we had failed, the onus would have been on us to accommodate passengers in a hotel in Spain, at our expense. As it was, 75% turned up on time. Before, we might have expected 10% at best.”

The biggest test to the service came in the spring of 2010, when Aer Lingus, like many European airlines, found much of its fleet grounded by the threat of volcanic ash which had drifted over from Iceland. “Without Oxygen8, we would have struggled to

## Who are Oxygen8?

Oxygen8 Communications is one of the largest privately-owned providers of international mobile, voice and billing services in the world.

Utilising its proven technology platform and global reach, Oxygen8 helps Mobile Operators, Corporates, media companies and infrastructure providers to develop new ways of interacting with customers and consumers Worldwide. Oxygen8 has created four core offerings within its business focused around Business Solutions, Mobile Marketing, Mobile Commerce and Telecoms Infrastructure.

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Information Systems Manager at Aer Lingus

cope, even if we'd had the time and resources to be able to contact people reliably,” Collins says. Instead, the Oxygen8 SMS gateway proved instrumental in keeping customers informed. At the time, CEO Christoph Mueller highlighted on the Aer Lingus web site that the airline had issued over half a million text messages to passengers during the crisis. This compares with 40,000 messages broadcast to passengers in an average month.

Similarly, over the harsh winter of 2010/11, Aer Lingus drew on the Oxygen8 facility to keep passengers informed about disruptions to services caused by heavy snow. “It’s also invaluable if there is a late change of terminal – by being able to broadcast the information immediately to passengers en route, we can avoid any panic that they’ll miss their flight,” Collins adds.

### From the gate to the hub

Aer Lingus also uses the SMS gateway internally, to keep pilots and crew updated about schedule changes and other operational issues, as well as for communicating technical, disruption and other operational issues to the management team.

“All of this means we have avoided the cost of implementing alternative measures to meet these needs,” Collins notes.

Having seen what’s possible, the airline has begun innovating with additional creative mobile services to keep passengers better informed in real time. A year ago, Aer Lingus extended its use of the Oxygen8 solution to include a booking reference number service, allowing optin passengers to receive full itinerary details via their mobile phones in advance of travelling.

“We’re also looking to use the Oxygen8 gateway as part of mobile check-in, enabling passengers to view their boarding passes on their phones,” Collins says. “This will be a key step

in moving from tactical use of SMS to knitting it into the core operations of the airline. Because the service has been proven to be extremely reliable, we find we’re thinking up innovative new uses for it. It’s become just like email – we take it for granted. We’ve benchmarked the solution retrospectively which has confirmed that Oxygen8 still leads the pack,” Collins concludes. “While there are deals on the web that offer one million messages for a low price, there would be no trace of whether they’d ever been delivered. Knowing that, with Oxygen8, we can reliably and instantly contact hundreds of thousands of passengers in one go, as we had to during the volcanic ash situation, is priceless.”

## Overview

### Customer

Aer Lingus

### Customer Objective

- Improve customer & staff communication
- Reduce costs of managing special events
- Build mobile marketing database

### Oxygen8 Communications Solution

- Mobile Marketing Platform
- Integrated message scheduling with online booking engine
- Oxygen8 Business Solutions consultancy

### Customer Benefits

- Improved cost effectiveness of customer communication
- Reduction in reliance on call centre agents

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