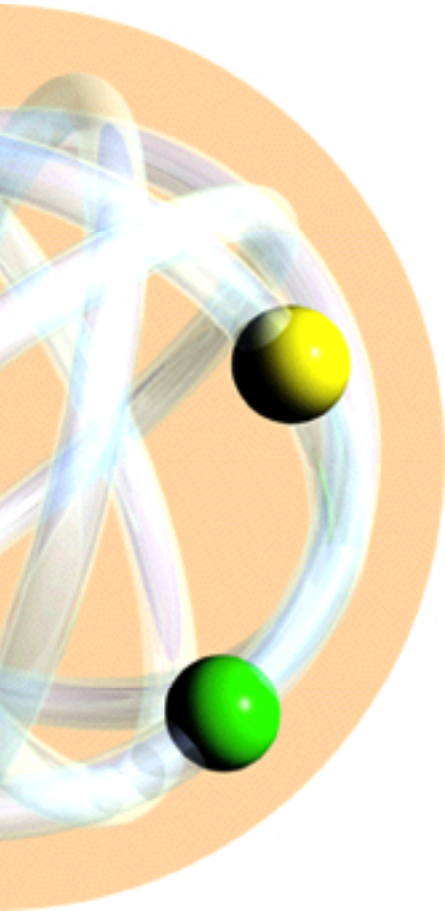


BSPlink

A Practical Guide to Implementation



March 2001
IDFS – Building for the future

BSPlink

Steps to Success

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A Step-by-step Guide to Successful Implementation

INTRODUCTION

BSPlink is the most important and fundamental automation initiative for BSPs in recent years. Its success is absolutely critical to ensuring that IDFS responds effectively to the changing industry environment and is positioned to continue to meet customer needs in the future. BSPlink **MUST** succeed and it is up to all IDFS staff to play a role in ensuring its success. In particular, the people responsible for implementing the system in the individual local markets have a vital role to play and will inevitably bear the major burden for success in that country.

However, having said that, much of the uncertainty and difficulty of implementing such a complex system can be reduced by following a structured and planned approach to the project. There are a number of critical success factors which, if well understood and appropriately addressed, can greatly ease the task of implementation. Conversely, if ignored, disaster could well be the result. Key factors in this regard are:

- Fully understand the local market – this is imperative!! So many factors involved in the implementation rely on good knowledge of the local environment in order to make informed decisions. Whilst much of this knowledge is readily available, if it is not collated and in a well-structured form, it will be impossible to effectively plan and manage the implementation.
- Understand the system – BSPlink is a complex application with many different functions, some of which are not appropriate to some local markets – decisions may need to be taken to not implement specific functions in a particular market for practical, business or other reasons. A good understanding of the system is therefore pre-requisite.
- Develop an appropriate strategy – the key strategic elements, such as what to implement, how to sell the concept, priorities and schedules, etc., will probably be unique to each market. It is essential to develop a strategy which is appropriate for the country in question – because an approach worked well in country X does not necessarily ensure success elsewhere. However, lessons can certainly be learned from earlier experience.
- Develop a practical plan – be realistic!! Do not underestimate the complexity of the task – and remember that many automation projects are delivered late, mainly due to over-optimism with regard to schedules, effort involved, etc.
- Allocate the right resources – it is essential to allocate sufficient resources with the appropriate skills and authority.

STEP 1

Kick-off – Aligning the Objectives

The key first step is for everyone to have a good and common understanding of the overall objectives. It is important that local, regional and central management all share the same view of what needs to be achieved and why. Whilst much of this has already been accomplished through briefings, meetings, etc., it is advisable to re-affirm the basic objectives for each local implementation. It is particularly important that local management understands and “buys into” the key concepts and is prepared to carry the project forward on the basis of agreed goals and deliverables.

In this context, key elements to be discussed include:

- The importance of BSPlink to the future of IDFS
- The main objectives of the project
- How the project can benefit the various stakeholders
- Critical success factors for the project
- The overall approach to the project
- Timing and scheduling considerations
- Other considerations, constraints, issues, etc.

It is suggested that the optimum method of covering these items is to hold a meeting between the management of the local office and representatives of the central and/or regional BSPlink teams, as appropriate.

STEP 2

Building the Team

The resource requirements for the local and regional implementation teams will vary depending on such items as the size of the customer base, the characteristics of the market, etc. However, a number of elements are clear:

- One person must be assigned on a full-time basis to be the local co-ordinator and act as the focal point for all project activities in the market. This person's current responsibilities must be reassigned to ensure full availability to work on the project.
- The local co-ordinator must have the support of and access to senior local IDFS management;
- If additional resources are necessary, the other staff involved must be formally assigned to work on the project; this is not an activity which can be handled on an ad hoc or casual basis;

- Allowance must be made to ensure the person(s) participating in the project have sufficient available time to conduct the assigned tasks; in this context, real location of tasks to other individuals may become necessary.

The local co-ordinator is crucial to the success of the implementation and should be chosen with care. The ideal skill-set for the assignment is given below – obviously it may be impossible to find individuals with all these skills in all markets but, given the utmost importance of this project, it is vital that a well-qualified person with sufficient seniority to conduct the duties is assigned to the task.

- Good knowledge of local environment and BSP policies, procedures and processes
- Project management experience
- Excellent communications skills and at ease dealing with people at all levels both within and outside the organisation
- Computer-literate with understanding of how automation can be applied to improve business processes
- Sufficient seniority to command respect and attention within IDFS and with customer groups
- Able to work on own initiative and carry through projects to completion.

The role of the local co-ordinator is to take responsibility for implementation of the system in the local market, including:

- Develop the implementation plan, taking into account the specifics of the local market
- Promote the system with customers and other stakeholders
- Co-ordinate the implementation requirements with the local DPC in terms of interfaces, testing, etc.
- Determine the impact of the system on local processes and propose appropriate changes to procedures to facilitate implementation.
- Obtain agents and airlines to support the test and pilot phases of the project
- Obtain customer feedback on the system and forward to the regional and central support teams.
- Co-ordinate the reporting of system errors and proposals for improvements
- Monitor and report progress against the plan, identify problems and issues and develop appropriate solutions.

STEP 3

Understanding the Product

It is essential that the team has a thorough understanding of the product at as early a stage as possible. This must include:

- Understanding of the various components (e.g. agent, airline, BSP, ticketing)
- Detailed knowledge of the functionality included in each component
- Understanding of why certain modules cannot be implemented in all markets
- Awareness of how the implementation of BSPlink will change working procedures, both within the BSP and for agent and airline customers.

In addition to the basic information resources listed below, the central and regional teams play a major role in ensuring that the local team has the required knowledge of the product through specific training/information sessions.

Available information resources are:

- Functional Overview document
- General BPI presentation
- General BSPlink presentation
- BSPlink demonstration module

Access to a test/training system will also be provided to obtain “hands-on” experience without risk of causing problems to any production environments.

In addition to understanding the product itself, it is important to also appreciate the opportunities it provides to streamline and improve current processes and procedures.

STEP 4

Research – Identifying Key Characteristics

This is possibly the most crucial element of the preparatory work for BSPlink implementation. It is very important to obtain an in-depth knowledge of the market and the key stakeholders. This will enable the implementation strategy to be tailored to meet the specific local needs.

The tables below indicate the major research areas and items – much of this information is probably already in existence and can be collated from existing documents, experience of the local management, etc.

The market research requirements fall into two main categories:

- Objective/factual – items that can be measured/quantified e.g. number of agent locations
- Subjective: - items which are less tangible e.g. agent views of IATA

Areas for research include the following:

- Basic business parameters and statistics
- Local processes and procedures
- Financial
- Current data processing environment
- Country/cultural elements

In addition, information needs to be collected/collated for the various customer and other stakeholder groups, such as:

- Travel agents
- Airlines
- GDS/ticketing system providers
- Trade associations
- Press/media

Full details of the proposed elements for research in each category can be found in the implementation guide.

STEP 5

Developing Implementation Scenarios

As previously mentioned, there are a number of different scenarios for implementing BSPLink and the selection of a particular solution will depend on the local situation. Elements to be considered include:

- Overall environment – is the market already highly automated, so the BSPLink ticket issuance function is not required; do the current ticketing systems provide for auto-refunds; etc.
- Capabilities of current DPC provider – depending on the provider and system, it may not be possible to implement all functions in the market
- Financial – what savings will be generated by implementation of BSPLink e.g. through reductions in manual data capture, electronic distribution of reports; etc.; Do the savings justify implementation of a particular function/module
- Other aspects applicable to local environment – e.g. relationships with stakeholders; technology infrastructure; etc.

To identify the optimum scenario(s) for the market, the central or regional team will work closely with the local team in evaluating the issues and developing a strategy for proceeding with implementation. This may result in some functions not being implemented, a possible phased roll-out of functionality, etc. The objective is to identify the best scenario for use in that particular market.

Having identified a preferred scenario, this should be validated with local and regional management as appropriate.

STEP 6

Building the Plan

Based on the previous steps, it is now possible to prepare a plan for the overall implementation activity. In this context, there are five key components or “tracks”, namely:

- Policies and procedures - there are several BSP procedures that are affected by the introduction of BSPlink. They consist of master file and data base updates as well as how ADM/ACM and refund transactions are processed. The impact of these changes on agents, airlines and the BSP itself need to be understood and planned for to ensure smooth implementation.
- Technical – issues and activities in this area include introducing BSPlink to the DPC, identifying and resolving any interface issues, preparing for testing the end-to-end process, etc.
- Communications – the key objective here is to develop a solid communications plan to inform all stakeholders of BSPlink and “sell” the system to the extent required to achieve full and smooth implementation.
- Training and support – this covers the training of local staff, reviewing the current customer service processes and identifying, preparing and implementing the necessary changes to the customer support structure within the BSP to cater for BSPlink.
- Phased testing and implementation – this is the core of the whole process and includes a phased approach from testing the initial system with a small number of agents and airlines, running a live pilot project with a broader representative base of users to progressive implementation of all users in the market.

Full details of all these areas, including the key elements to be addressed in preparing appropriate strategies and plans, can be found in the appropriate sections of the BSPlink Implementation Guide.

Also, it is clear that there are many links between the various components which need to be recognised.

STEP 7

Implementing the Plan

Easy to say – maybe not so easy to do. The completion of the steps mentioned above is a pre-requisite for successful implementation. However, there are a number of fundamental elements without which implementation will be jeopardised. These include:

- Obtaining the co-operation of the local DPC – the DPC plays a vital role in the success of the BSPlink project. It will be required to receive data from and pass files to the BSPlink system in an accurate, timely and efficient manner to ensure that the core BSP services are maintained during and following implementation.
- Getting the initial message right – the first contacts with customers re BSPlink are crucial in building a solid foundation of support and enthusiasm. It is important that the initial messages are appropriate to the market, are delivered by the right people to the various audiences and set the scene for future contacts during implementation. In this context, careful research and understanding of the environment (Step 4 above) is a necessity.
- Careful selection of users for test and pilot phases – This is important in terms of ensuring that the selected users are generally representative of the market, willing and enthusiastic to participate and likely to provide honest feedback with regard to their views on the system.
- Thorough initial testing – careful testing, first by the local team and then by a small group of test agents and airlines will verify that the functions to be deployed are suitable for the market and that the overall system performs as expected. It is much easier to make changes to the plan and implementation strategy at this stage prior to any live transactions being passed through the system. Thorough testing of the interfaces between the DPC and BSPlink is also vital.
- Obtaining general “buy-in” for the system – thorough application of an appropriate communications strategy, especially obtaining the support of key influential people in the various customer communities, can greatly facilitate the “marketing” of the system for large-scale implementation.
- Changing processes to facilitate implementation – it is quite likely that current processes will need modification to cater for the full implementation of BSPlink.
- Listening to customer feedback – Ultimately, the success or failure of the system will largely be determined by the attitudes of agents and airlines towards its use. Hence, obtaining and analysing feedback from customers is important both in the context of the local implementation but can also be beneficial to the deployment in other markets.

STEP 8

Project Management and Reporting

This is not so much a discrete step as an ongoing process throughout the project. The importance of the local co-ordinator as the focal point for implementation has already been highlighted. The co-ordinator is likely to be the only person who has a complete overview of implementation activities in the market and can therefore spot problems, issues, dependencies, etc. and take corrective action. A process of periodic structured reviews of progress can greatly assist in the early identification of problems. This should be conducted in conjunction with local management and other local representatives as appropriate.

Further, feedback on progress to the regional and central support teams will facilitate:

- Identification of common problems and potential solutions;
- Obtaining additional support and assistance from regional/central teams
- Escalation of problems to more senior levels as appropriate
- Enabling the central team to have a complete picture of BSPlink implementation on a world-wide basis.

This is not intended to be a burden, more a tool for effective management and ensuring that actions can be taken and support provided at an early stage when it can do most good.

Further details of recommended processes in this area can be found in the Implementation Guide.