



SUCCESS STORY

Rail Europe, Inc.

Connecting with Customers to Make
Travel Dreams a Reality



Company Profile

Rail Europe, Inc. distributes passes and tickets for more than 35 European railroads, as well as other European travel products, to customers in North and Central America. Founded in the 1930s, the company is headquartered in White Plains, New York.

The Results

Sales Results

- **34%** higher average booking value with live chat than without
- **24%** conversion rate for live chat

Customer Experience

- **12%** return rate for exit surveys
- **92%** customer satisfaction rate for live chat

Customer Engagement

- **300%** increase in live chat volume, from 25,000 to 75,000, upon deploying LivePerson and proactive chat
- **85%** call deflection for customers experiencing error messages

Rail Europe, Inc., wanted to provide an additional channel to enable more personalized sales support for its websites marketing travel products for travel agents and consumers.

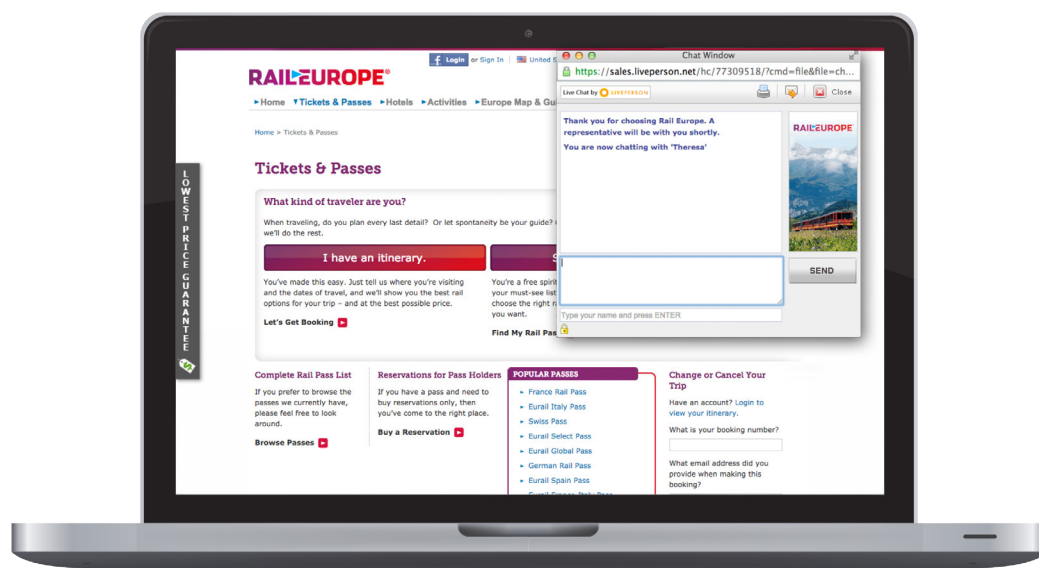
It deployed a rudimentary live chat solution in 2009, but upgraded to a LivePerson solution with proactive chat in 2011. Sales results have been very impressive, with a conversion rate of 24 percent for live chat and an average booking value 34 percent higher than with those who did not participate in live chat. LivePerson proactive chat enabled a 300 percent increase in live chat volume and an 85 percent call deflection for visitors experiencing error messages. And live chat boasts a customer satisfaction rate of 92 percent.

In Europe, train travel is often the fastest, least expensive, and most pleasant way to get from Point A to Point B. But navigating the complexities of more than 35 different railroads can be daunting for North Americans who are not accustomed to that mode of travel. Fortunately, Rail Europe, Inc. has served as a trusted advisor for transatlantic tourists for more than 80 years.

"We put the maps, schedules, and fares together to offer a one-stop shop for our customers," explains Ludy Reyna, Rail Europe's vice president of operations. "Our reputation for quality service has made us the largest North American distributor of rail products. We also help with the journey between train rides with add-ons such as guided tours, hop on-hop off buses, local Metro tickets, and even hotel deals."

"Our employees are passionate about Europe and experts in train travel," adds Stacy Bartels, Rail Europe's director of operations. "We make sure they are experts by providing a five-week training program for new employees, ongoing training for everyone during the low season, and employee trips to Europe every year where our agents get to see firsthand some of what we sell."

The results of this big investment in employees have been significant. "Average longevity of employees for a typical U.S. contact center is around 18 months," notes Bartels, a 14-year veteran of the company. "At Rail Europe, our average longevity is 10 years. Our agents enjoy helping people create an experience—a once-in-a-lifetime experience in many cases. Our philosophy is to empower them to make those experiences a reality."



The Challenges

- Offer a comfortable channel to answer visitor questions
- Reduce abandoned shopping cart rate
- Improve average booking value via cross-sell and upsell opportunities
- Provide faster, easier service in the event of an error message

The Solution

Engagement Model:

Live chat for sales support on B2B and B2C sites

Key Capabilities

LiveEngage platform with Click to Chat, proactive chat, and rules-based targeting

Customer Success

Deployment assistance, agent training, and ongoing touch points to optimize operations

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Because we pay according to our usage, we can scale for the peak season without opening an RFP.

— Ludy Reyna, Vice President, Operations, Rail Europe, Inc.

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A first stab at live chat

It was this commitment to personalized service that led Rail Europe to deploy its first live chat channel in 2009. “We started with a very basic tool that was available through our telecommunications vendor,” recalls Reyna, who has been with Rail Europe for 20 years. “It had no proactive chat, no reporting, and no canned responses; it was just typing back and forth. And it was an on-premise solution that the IT team had to manage.”

Reyna’s team quickly found that customers were very interested in engaging Rail Europe via live chat, but it was equally apparent that the rudimentary solution was not going to be adequate for the long term. “The platform was very limited, and we knew that we needed to take a more strategic approach,” she recalls. “So we spent some time trying to identify areas where a robust live chat solution might help us.”

Taking a strategic approach

Reyna’s team identified two use cases that would realize the most benefit with a broader solution. “The first was cart abandonment,” she says. “We knew which product pages had the highest abandonment rates, and those tended to be on the more complex products. If we could make ourselves available via proactive chat to answer questions, fewer people would leave our site in confusion.”

The second was to take better advantage of opportunities to sell add-on products to customers buying rail tickets. “Of course, the add-ons bring us more revenue,” Reyna observes. “But they also enable us to enhance our customers’ entire travel experience and add to our role as a trusted advisor for European travel. We wanted to be able to suggest these products at the right time in the process.”

From a technical perspective, Rail Europe’s IT team advocated strongly for a demonstrably secure, cloud-based solution. “They didn’t want to have to buy and maintain servers, as that would reduce their team’s efficiency,” Reyna relates. “And we needed a solution that would comply with our ISO certification—including encryption of all interactions and PCI compliance.”



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We're always looking for the 'sweet spot' where response rates and conversions are at their best.

— Jen Waters, Live Chat Team Supervisor, Rail Europe, Inc.

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Searching for a new solution

Reyna's team explored another, more robust live chat solution from Rail Europe's phone carrier but found that it did not meet all of the team's requirements. Back at square one, the team was researching live chat solutions via Google when Reyna remembered an outreach email she had received from a LivePerson representative a few months earlier. She found the email and arranged a meeting.

After the first meeting, it was clear to Reyna and her team that LivePerson exceeded all of Rail Europe's requirements and provided an opportunity to scale the program in the future. “We were impressed with LivePerson's holistic vision for digital engagement, and we were convinced that they were in the best position to meet our current and future needs,” Reyna says.

Deploying LiveEngage

The LiveEngage platform went live on Rail Europe's websites in March 2011. “It was actually very easy,” Bartels recalls. “Once we signed contracts, the LivePerson Customer Success team immediately worked with our IT team to configure everything and helped my team write the targeting rules. Then LivePerson sent a trainer to our contact center to get everyone up to speed on the platform. Everything was smooth sailing from there.”

Rail Europe used a different approach for each of its Web properties. “We have two websites—a B2B site for travel agencies and a B2C site for consumers,” Reyna explains. “For the B2B site, we have a static Click-to-Chat button that travel agents can use when they need assistance. Our B2C site, on the other hand, uses proactive chat invitations. So when visitors exhibit certain behaviors—stalling on a page, placing a certain amount in a shopping cart—and an agent is available, they are invited to chat.”

The company also placed a Click-to-Chat button on all error messages that a user might encounter. “We previously put our phone number, but there is often a waiting time for phone service during the peak season,” Bartels explains. “The chat link greatly increased the number of visitors who engaged with us after seeing error messages.”

Growing the program

The company started with four live chat agents, whom Bartels recruited from the phone agent team. Rail Europe now has eight full-time live chat agents and four seasonal agents who join the team during the summer peak. Several field sales professionals also volunteer to log in remotely to LiveEngage a few hours per week to help during high season. “LivePerson's cloud-based platform makes the remote login possible,” Reyna notes. “And because we pay according to our usage rather than buying concurrent agent positions, we can scale for the peak season without opening an RFP for additional licenses.”

Rail Europe's LivePerson Customer Success value manager met with the team regularly in the early months, making sure operations were smooth and helping them tweak targeting rules for optimal success. “We have around eight targeting rules at present, and our value manager continues to meet with us quarterly to assess progress and recommend rules adjustments,” reports Jen Waters, an 18-year Rail Europe veteran who became the live chat team supervisor a year ago. “We're always looking for the 'sweet spot' where response rates and conversions are at their best.”

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Optimizing operations

When Waters assumed her current role, she was charged with taking operations to the next level. “I had never used LivePerson before, so it was a new challenge,” she relates. “Fortunately, the LivePerson team was extremely helpful as I got up to speed. It is great that they provide support through the same platform that we use, and it’s the best way to get a quick answer to a question.”

One of Waters’ first projects was to revamp the pre-defined responses that had been added to the LiveEngage platform on an ad-hoc basis over the years. “Most of them were too lengthy and not very conversational,” she recalls. “My team and I examined each canned response and decided whether to remove it, change it, or shorten it. These answers are now much more useful to agents, and the customer experience is better since the responses aren’t so robotic.”

Waters also expanded the company’s use of LivePerson’s enrichment analytics capabilities to optimize operations. “I am always looking at reports from LiveEngage to see what we could be doing better,” she says. “For instance, when I see that a lot of live chat conversations are coming from a single Web page, I look over the conversations to identify improvements to that page that could result in fewer visitors getting stuck. I then send those suggested changes over to the Web team for review.”

Waters also reviews and publicizes the weekly agent report sent from the LiveEngage platform. “I find that when agents know they fielded 218 chats and someone else fielded 220, they’re motivated to step up their game,” she says with a smile. And when she is at her desk, she is always logged into LiveEngage so that she can monitor conversations and provide assistance. “If they get stuck, I can send a private message with advice on how to proceed,” she explains.

Leveraging powerful features

Agents on Waters’ team have a number of tools at their disposal as they chat with customers, but push pages are by far the most commonly used. “The nature of our business is to show customers different options,” she notes. “Most often, the easiest way to illustrate those options is to push Web links to those product pages. For example, when visitors mention that they want to visit a certain attraction, we can push them the description of a tour of that attraction.”

Another useful feature is the visitor’s browsing history, which can be seen at a glance on the agent console. “It gives them a lot of intelligence to be more successful in answering the visitor’s question,” Waters relates. “It also improves the customer experience, as we can make suggestions that are consistent with what they have been looking for.”

Rail Europe uses surveys on both of its websites to track customer satisfaction and identify ways to provide better service. “Our exit survey on both sites asks three questions,” Bartels says. “How was our overall service? Did you receive the outcome you were looking for? And would you recommend us to someone else?” On the B2B site, Rail Europe also uses a short pre-chat survey that asks travel agents to acknowledge that Rail Europe agents cannot make a booking for a travel agent, but can help in answering questions so that they can complete the booking themselves.

“We’re pleased with LivePerson’s surveys because we get a high response rate,” Reyna relates. “Since the survey pops up right away after the chat, we get 10 to 12 percent of them completed—which is much higher than with any of our other surveys.”

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— Stacy Bartels, Director, Operations, Rail Europe, Inc.

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Impressive results

Those surveys show that Rail Europe's customers love the live chat channel. "We have a 92 percent customer satisfaction rating for live chat," Bartels reports. "But even more important to us is that we actually receive a lot of quality feedback from customers in the written text field. This helps us to continually improve our services."

Live chat volume is another illustration of the popularity of the channel. "We had 25,000 live chat conversations in 2009 with the old solution," Reyna relates. "The year we deployed LivePerson, that volume quickly tripled to 75,000. Adding proactive chat definitely improved our engagement with customers who were having problems on our site."

The LiveEngage solution has also had a positive impact on Rail Europe's bottom line. "The average booking value is 34 percent higher for chat-assisted transactions than those who don't chat with us," Bartels reports. "And the conversion rate for live chat is 24 percent, which is astounding for us. We are more successful in keeping our clients on the website through the completion of the order, and we are offering other products that they might not have considered buying from us."

The Click-to-Chat button on error messages yielded impressive results as well. "So far this year, we have had more than 500 chats from that button, and only 75 had to be escalated to phone support," Bartels says. "This means an 85 percent call deflection rate for these cases. And those customers are more satisfied because the issue is resolved more quickly."

Looking to the future

When Reyna asked Waters to take on the live chat team supervisor role a year ago, she did so with an eye toward the future. "Her coming on board was truly a milestone in the development of our digital engagement strategy," Reyna asserts. "With her skills, we will be able to take full advantage of what LivePerson has to offer." Now that Waters has streamlined the team's operations, she looks forward to expanding Rail Europe's LivePerson footprint over the coming months.

One near-term project is to use LivePerson's content targeting capabilities to push customized offers and promotions to select visitors according to targeting rules. "For example, if a customer is on a product for which we have a promotion, a pop-up can remind them about the promotion," Waters explains. "Or if a visitor is stalling in the checkout process, we can push a limited-time discount coupon to encourage quick conversion. We hope to set up several campaigns once the summer rush is over."

Another enhancement under consideration is to add LivePerson's mobile Click-to-Chat tool to the company's responsive websites. "We actually see a lot of iPad bookings today," Reyna notes. "We expect more and more of our visitors to be on mobile devices, and having a customized live chat experience that fits the device will be mandatory for us before too long."

Creating memories for customers

Reyna and her team find their jobs rewarding because they help customers realize their dreams of European travel, and LivePerson live chat has enhanced that endeavor in many ways. "We wanted to be able to engage with our customers at a more personal level, and LivePerson has certainly helped us succeed in that regard," Reyna contends. Adds Bartels: "Not only are we having meaningful connections with customers, but the reporting capabilities help us to deliver even better service in the future."

From the front lines of customer service, Waters and her team agree. "Our customers love the ability to get a very quick answer to a question without picking up the phone," she says. "I can regularly see from the tone of customers' feedback that they are very happy with the interaction, and very excited to be going to Europe. It makes our work rewarding."

About LivePerson

LivePerson, Inc. (NASDAQ: LPSN) offers a cloud-based platform that enables businesses to proactively connect in real-time with their customers via chat, voice, and content delivery at the right time, through the right channel, including websites, social media, and mobile devices. This "intelligent engagement" is driven by real-time behavioral analytics, producing connections based on a true understanding of business objectives and customer needs. LivePerson is headquartered in New York City with offices in San Francisco, Atlanta, Tel Aviv, London, Amsterdam, and Melbourne.

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