



# HAWAIIAN AIRLINES' MODERN, CLOUD- BASED CALL CENTER VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

(electronic music)

**Lisa Martin:** Welcome to theCUBE. This is the AWS Executive Summit presented by Accenture and our coverage of this great event continues. Lisa Martin here, I've got two guests with me here to talk about Amazon Connect. Please welcome from Hawaiian Airlines, Will Van Devender, Senior Director of IT Engineering. Will, welcome to the program.

**Will Van Devender:** Thanks for having me here.

**Lisa Martin:** And from Accenture, Erich Chen is here as well, the Hawaii Regional Lead at Accenture. Erich, it's great to have you on the program.

**Erich Chen:** It's great to be here.

**Lisa Martin:** I feel very overdressed. You can tell I'm on the mainland with my turtleneck and you guys are on Oahu, which is fantastic. And I'm excited that I have a seat on Hawaiian Airlines in just a few weeks. So, you guys, let's talk about this technology solution that you put together. Will, I want to start with you. Talk to me about some of the challenges that Hawaiian Airlines was having prior to working with Accenture and Amazon.

**Will Van Devender:** Well, nothing really unique to us. We had the challenges that everybody had with the pandemic and

scaling out to work from home, as well as an old legacy stack that had been around for a long, long time. The specific ones that drove us to launch this particular project was we had been running into some talent acquisition issues. We're not of size where we have a huge telecom team that can specialize in IVRs and other things like that. So we need folks that can play a lot of different spaces. And in this particular case, we had a situation where we had really old technology and the people we were bringing in were a lot more savvy on cloud and those kinds of things.

And so, AWS Connect was a way for us to take talent that traditionally wasn't inside the telephony space and use them and bring them to bear for that business need. So it kept us from having to scale up to do this. The other thing we had was a big issue with work from home that actually predated COVID. So we had been, we're in a hurricane zone, we had been doing hurricane preparedness exercises and we realized that we had a difficult time scaling our environment to large scale work from home. So even prior to COVID, we had been started looking at the technologies that we had, which ones worked well outside of an office for a distributed workforce. And we had been moving technology in that direction. And so, telephony was one of the ones that we had to beef up. And so, it was nice to have a good leg up on it when the pandemic hit us.



**Lisa Martin:** Absolutely. I can't imagine how advantageous that was when it struck. And, of course, we all know how much the airlines were affected. Talk to me about an interesting catalyst for this solution in terms of challenge with talent acquisition and work from home. Interesting impetus for this solution. Talk to me about, are you long time partners, Hawaiian Airlines with Accenture? Talk to me about how you went about looking for the right solution with them as a partner?

**Will Van Devender:** Ah, okay. So Hawaiian Airlines and Accenture had been partnering for many years, but in a much bigger way in 2019, when we solidified a new managed services deal. So Accenture came in to help us out with our day-to-day operations. And one of the big reasons for that was actually cloud adoption. So we needed a partner that was much more up to date technology wise. And as we started ramping up our engineering and architecture designs and releasing things on new stacks, we needed folks in the operation side that could keep up with that. And not only that, actually enable and push us in those directions. And so, when we went out to RFP, Accenture kind of stood out in that area and that's been a good thing. We've had very little friction as we've been going out and acquiring new technology with being able to bring that out to our run and operation space.

**Lisa Martin:** That's critical, especially given the tumultuous times in which we are still living. Erich, let's go ahead and bring you into the conversation. Now, talk to me about you guys at Accenture developed and deployed this solution quickly. We're talking an eight-week timeframe. Talk to me about the solution that you architected, about that delivery, and what some of the challenges were along the way that you tackled and mitigated?

**Erich Chen:** Yeah. Thanks, Lisa. I mean, it was, you know, eight weeks when you look back on it, it's hard to believe we did

complete it in that timeframe, but, you know, we were able to do it with some strong experts from our side. Some of the challenges we ran into along the way were probably at the very beginning, just securing the right team for Hawaiian to deliver the kind of the proper designs and development upfront, and then helping to kind of manage through the delivery process itself. You know, they were great. They had some great people with some deep expertise, kind of from a business process side of things, kind of paired with our technical and then also industry knowledge of the airlines as well. It made for a really nice, you know, strong partnership where we could get it through in eight weeks. So it was pretty amazing.

**Lisa Martin:** And then walk me through the actual, oh, Will, sorry, did you want to say something?

**Will Van Devender:** Yeah, I was actually going to comment on that, that was exactly what we were looking for was that sort of wholesale partner. So when we went out to modernize our entire telephony stack, it wasn't just call centers. It was the conference rooms, it was the telephony, we went to new phone providers and circuit providers, we moved everyone off of Skype over onto Teams, all the desk phones. And so, there was this scope of work that was simply larger than our team. And so, what we were looking for from a partner was, one, who's done this before and then, two, could you manage the whole piece of work? And so, what was nice for Accenture, because they owned our existing operation space, they not only did the AWS Connect piece, they got on the old systems and they brought up all the specs of how the call queues worked, how the call flows worked, they found the old voice talent, they brought those, imported them without us having to do anything over onto the new stack, and then brought it over for testing.



So it was just a very minimal lift from the Hawaiian Airlines side. And since they ran our operations, they then moved it over to the run space. And it was just very few man hours on the Hawaiian Airlines side expended for that outcome.

**Lisa Martin:** Wow. It sounds fairly seamless. Erich, how did you guys accomplish that?

**Erich Chen:** I mean, that's a type of experience and partnership we like to have with our clients, more of an all-inclusive type service. But we're sometimes accused of not having the cheapest prices on the block, but you know, you do get a great, you know, a pretty holistic experience with us and we do try to make it as easy as possible for our clients and bring kind of the full breadth of Accenture to fill in a lot of gaps.

**Lisa Martin:** Well, one of the things, Will, that you mentioned is we were looking for a partner that had done this before, where there's actual proof in the pudding, especially given the, like I mentioned before, the tumultuous market. Erich, talk to me about, if we look at Hawaiian Airlines as an example, as a template here, how common or how often are you seeing these same challenges with respect to talent acquisition and work from home? Is that something that really skyrocketed in the last year and a half?

**Erich Chen:** Sure. I mean, it's maybe a blessing in the type of business that we're in, right. But whenever there are, you know, big, you know, kind of market issues and kind of pandemics as an example, right. Our clients do turn to us for, you know, support to help them through, you know, smaller times of need. And, you know, maybe very compressed issues. So we're very happy to, you know, reach into our larger organization to make sure that we can bring the best of Accenture to them and help them get through these tough times.

**Lisa Martin:** Will, let's talk about how this solution is helping employees, agents get through these tough times. As we know, Hawaii had some really strict travel restrictions on COVID. And, of course, one of the things that a lot of people lost during this time was patience. Talk to me about how the workforce is improving, the employees, the agents, now that you have this solution implemented and a leg up probably on your competitors?

**Will Van Devender:** Yeah, the whole pandemic hit us in a hard way. So we found ourselves, you know, all of a sudden one day waking up and finding that our customer facing support desks couldn't be staffed. People couldn't get into the office and actually get there. At the same time, as you and everyone else knows, flights were getting canceled and customers were calling at a level we'd never seen before trying to reschedule their flights or get credit back or get money back. And so, AWS Connect was interesting in that it was one of the things we could ramp up new call centers very quickly. And so, we knew we wanted something that was consumption-based because we didn't know how long it was going to last.

And we wanted to be able to spin it up, get new agents going, respond to our customers, scale up to the volume, and then be able to decrease it out. So it was a good win there. What wasn't talked about much was the reliability aspect of it. Being on a really old system, our telephony was pretty stable, but our call center internal business facing ones were not. We had a series of outages out there and those outages directly impact our ability to get planes out in the air. There's the sort of customers calling about tickets and about help with flights, but there's also things like cruise, trying to get cruise scheduling done, trying to get staffing to a plane, trying to get things moved around in an airport. And there's a lot of internal desks that deal with those kinds of things.



And having that on an incredibly stable technology and stack is key for us. And so, we were able to get Connect deployed, and we were also able to front that with a number of other technologies that allowed us to have DR plans. So even if we lost that desk, how can we quickly move that over to manual calls and desk phones and those kinds of things. And so that's been, that part has been very well received. That has helped us out a lot. Our confidence, knowing that if anything should happen, our ability to recover and get back into full operations now is just night and day from where it was 12 months ago. And so, thank you all very much for your assistance in getting us to this point.

**Lisa Martin:** Getting that stability and that reliability during a time of chaos that's, and also in a time that can really affect brand reputation, it sounds to me, Will, like IT is really helping drive the business forward. This is something that you did in partnership with the business side, because, of course, during the last year and a half, so many brands have had challenges with reputation and the ability to not do things. Talk to me about that business IT relationship. And was this a facilitator of making that even better?

**Will Van Devender:** Well, it's certainly better. Yeah, we have far better conversations internally than I can ever remember in my time here in Hawaiian Airlines. But you know, when these kinds of emergencies hit, I don't think about it as IT or business. I mean, there's a problem and you got to go fix it. And so, we're all in there and IT is one piece of that. How do we get a solution stood up almost overnight in this, you know, very, very difficult pandemic business time? But, you know, the business is trying to get talent together and trying to get agents trained and being able to do things like handle these customer calls is very, very skill intensive. So there's a lot of partnership coming in and getting solutions, demoing with the

**business, dialing them in back and forth, and a lot of collaboration there. And so, that builds stronger teams. And that's one of the outcomes I like more than anything else, is we're working together and dialing in the IT and the business needs very much in unison.**

**Lisa Martin:** That's probably one of the best outcomes you can hope for. Erich, talk to me about, are you seeing similar things with customers in other industries? Are you seeing that business IT coming together, especially during these challenging times we've been living through?

**Erich Chen:** Yeah, to varying degrees, you know, that's always the crux of, you know, a successful IT department, right. You know, you're there to serve and support the business side of things, right. We don't do technology for technology sake. But, yeah, I think the better ones are getting better, better at, you know, being more fully integrated and it's not a business or IT decision, right, it's a collective kind of team decision. And I think as long as you have people who respect and understand the other side of the coin sometimes, easier the conversation will go. And I think that's what our team was able to do is express, you know, very clearly and concisely kind of what the decisions they had to make were and they could make a decision a little bit easier that way.

**Lisa Martin:** And talk to me, Erich, about the solution, what impressed you? What are you most excited about in terms of what Accenture has helped to accomplish for Hawaiian Airlines?

**Erich Chen:** Yeah, I was really happy that even, you know, within a short eight-week period itself, you know, things always come up as you go throughout a project. And I think the business team was getting excited about the possibilities once they saw kind of the potential of the platform. And so, some, you know, requests came up in the middle of the way, you know, in flight. And, you know, our team was able to accommodate a number of the kind of minor enhancements or tweaks to the system to make it even better and serve the business in a better fashion there.



**Lisa Martin:** Gotcha. Will, what is next for Hawaiian Airlines, besides my flight on it in a few weeks? Talk to me about where you guys are going from an IT perspective?

**Will Van Devender:** Well, we've rolled out a solution quickly 'cause we needed to, but there's a lot still to be done to dial it in for the business. Where reliability and speed were key, we got those done, but there was some aspects of the old system that were still a little easier. For those call centers where people needed to dial in, get ahold of an agent, and then pass it onto an internal employee, there's still a disconnect between our call center technology, AWS Connect, and the internal collaboration, Microsoft Teams. And that's because Teams really wasn't up to all of the call center technology needs at the time we started this. Things like call recording and things like that just weren't there at the time. So we've got some of our internal desks that still need to be tweaked and integrated more seamlessly between the two platforms or maybe as Teams gets ready, moved back over onto that.

So that's, again, the part of it, being able to have this deep conversation with the business, understand their needs, having a partner where you can quickly go respond and go dial it in. And so, we don't look at it as our telephony migration is complete. We look at it as we got our first big hurdle done, moving off decades old tech onto our modern stack. And now we're looking at refining it with our partners over the future.

**Lisa Martin:** Right. Phase one, it's always that journey that we talk about. Erich, last question for you. What are some of the things that are coming up next as you help Hawaiian Airlines to continue on this modernization journey?

**Erich Chen:** Yeah, so more broadly we're really excited because this effort was one of the first or probably more platform centric system integration type projects we've done for Hawaiian. We've been on the operation side, we've done some business consulting worked with them for various business functions already, but this was really more on the application modernization side of things. And, you know, we see that Hawaiian has a number of areas that they're looking to kind of modernize and improve along the way. And we're very excited about, you know, being a strong partner for them in that journey coming up.

**Lisa Martin:** Awesome, guys, great work. Congratulations on the huge transformation accomplished during a very chaotic world time period and done so quickly. We appreciate your comments, your feedback, and look forward to seeing what you dial in next. Thanks for joining me today.

**Will Van Devender:** Thank you.

**Erich Chen:** Thanks very much.

**Lisa Martin:** For Will Van Devender and Erich Chen, I'm Lisa Martin. You're watching theCUBE's coverage of the AWS Executive Summit presented by Accenture.

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