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Comair Back in Air After Computer Outage

By Jim Wagner
December 27, 2004

UPDATED: Comair airlines was scrambling to contain the fallout from a cancellation of over 1,000 flights on Christmas Day after its computer systems for reservations crashed, saying it expects to be running at 60 percent by Monday evening.

Officials of the Cincinnati-based subsidiary of Delta Air Lines blamed severe weather in the middle state regions as the cause of a surge in crew flight re-assignments that knocked out its computer reservations system. The disruption snarled airline traffic and stranded passengers up and down the eastern- and middle-region states through the weekend.

The airline said by Sunday, it had resumed operations for 10 to 15 percent of its scheduled flights and planned to be close to full flight schedule by mid-week. But it did caution that cancellations would impact travel at least until Friday.

"Comair employees in every area of the organization continue working nonstop to resume full flight operations as safely and quickly as possible," said Don Bornhorst, Comair senior vice president of customers, in a statement Monday. "Given the tremendous impact the winter weather had on our operation and infrastructure, we appreciate the continued understanding and patience of our customers whose travel plans were disrupted. We also appreciate the assistance we have received from everyone at Delta Air Lines during this challenging situation."

Comair officials were not available for comment at press time.

Press reports put the amount of discomfited passengers at 30,000 on 1,100 flights on Christmas day. Delta Air lines Thursday had reduced its operations in Illinois, Ohio, New York, Indiana, Kentucky, Canada and Pennsylvania because of the bad weather.

According to the *New York Times*, Comair's outage occurred when workers, trying to arrange new flights after a snowstorm raged through the Midwest, overwhelmed the system.

A Slashdot.org post on the incident claimed the software running the flight crew



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assignment system came from SBS International, which markets a variety of flight operations applications under its Maestro product line. A spokesperson was not available at press time.

Comair also has a flight-crew software arrangement with another company, Sabre Airline Solutions. In June, according to the Sabre Web site, company officials announced the airline had purchased its Sabre AirCrews Operations Manager application.

Mike Berman, a Sabre spokesman, said the company's software wasn't responsible for the airline's outage.

"Comair does use a small software module from us, but that essentially checks crew qualifications and that was not the cause of this issue," he said.

Shares of Delta were off by about 1.46 percent to \$7.45 during an upbeat trading session following the long Christmas Holiday weekend that was generally easy on most airline stocks.

Shares of US Airways, which is in bankruptcy reorganization and trades on over-the-counter markets, fell by 13 cents to \$1.25 in midday trading after a massive sick-out by baggage handlers stranded thousands more holiday passengers around the nation, as well as their baggage.



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