

# Interview with Peter Robert

## Chief architect @ British Airways

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**Hello Peter Robert, you are chief architect at British Airways, The person in**

**charge of the ba.com site. Could you describe to us your background?**

### **Peter Robert**

I started work thirty years ago at IBM. During this period I had several opportunities of working for British Airways as a consultant. In 1999 British Airways made me a proposal to join their team, which I accepted. The first year I worked on the BA test system, I then had the opportunity of taking the responsibility for the architecture of the "ba.com" site. Since 2000, I am the "chief architect" for the British Airways web site.

**What are the principal responsibilities for a chief architect?**

We currently have a system which functions well, reliability and the performance are good, we propose with our customers and our partners of the services in line 24h/24h. My role is to guarantee this quality of service. At the same time, it is also necessary to think of the evolution of the system not only on the technical part but also on the business part. At the beginning, we started our site with simple sale of tickets, now we offer very many services to our customers and our partners. Ba.com became a key application of our information system.

**Could you describe the architecture of ba.com simply?**

For ba.com, we defined a traditional Web architecture in three levels. It is the Web part which presents information to our customers in 5 European languages of which

"French" is one, then the applications server which is the intermediary with our legacy systems like the reservation system for example.

The whole of the site is developed in Java on Weblogic servers. We only use the Web as a channel of presentation, it does not have heavy clients in our architecture. It is a traditional configuration which functions very well. Most important for us is the possibility to easily put our applications on clustered systems. The high availability is a very strong constraint for us. All must function 24h/24h. We prefer to have 10 clusters who function together rather than to use solutions of safeguard sites. If a machine breaks down, then the 9 others will continue to provide services for our customers.

**Thus, is the availability your main**



**concern?**

Yes it is! Another interesting point: We started ba.com on Unix servers, since we migrated our applications on X86 machines under Linux. That decreased our server budget. We manage to provide a high availability at a very reasonable cost.

**With increasingly strong competition between airline companies, the business exerts a strong pressure on the data-processing persons in charge so that it most quickly adapts to it needs.**

**How do you respond to these demands?**

At BA we have invested a great deal in the development of components. We have now approximately a hundred components which provide the useful basic services for the business. The sub adjacent idea here is for the future to be able to orchestrate these components to provide on

demand increasingly more complex services within the frameworks of a service architecture. Another important thing, we strongly insist on the use of standards. We also standardized our procedure of development in order to be the most reactive possible.

**BA is migrating towards a service architecture. Which are for you the "technical parts" missing in the SOA currently suggested on the market.**

What misses overall, the practice! There are now very many possibilities and good tools to define a SOA. But being given the important thing of ba.com, one cannot be satisfied with theory, it is necessary to be sure of its blow. We must initially put these new techniques in practice, produce prototypes, train architects and developers so that they have experience and knowledge to make on these technologies. I very much favour a migration towards a services architecture, but for all these reasons, we have not yet chosen products (ESB, engine of rule, BPL...). As soon as I feel my teams are sufficiently mature on these techniques, then we will be able to begin our migration towards a SOA

**Peter, Thank you very much.**

Thank you..