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API: as easy as ordering a pizza

The logistics industry has entered the age of API. How is this simple technology paving the way for a more efficient air cargo business?

Did you know that the last time you ordered a pizza with your smartphone, it was possible thanks to an API? Most of our consumers' day-to-day digital experiences – from the booking of a hotel room to the rating of a movie or the downloading of software – would not be possible without Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) working in the background and allowing machine-to-machine, or system-to-system, communication.

How does it work? It is very simple, in fact. An API is a script that, like a messenger, runs back and forth between applications, databases and devices, delivering the interactivity that makes our daily life easier. So, the next question is: **Why isn't it used more extensively in the air cargo and logistics industry to make our day-to-day operations easier, too?**

The air cargo industry never had a reputation as a technological pioneer, and years after most businesses have switched to APIs, a large majority of air cargo companies – forwarders, carriers, handling agents – still use electronic data interchanges (EDIs), a technology first developed in 1948, to share data. The problem with EDI is that, while it has served us well all these years, it is rather complex to develop and can be too rigid to support our business needs in a dynamic marketplace.

In contrast, APIs are easy to develop and maintain, they are based on technology standards, and enable connected communication. With rising demand for “full visibility”, these API characteristics are not only necessary, they also provide a way to address the growing needs of the industry centered on a connected and collaborative ecosystem. However, only a very few air cargo players have been using APIs.

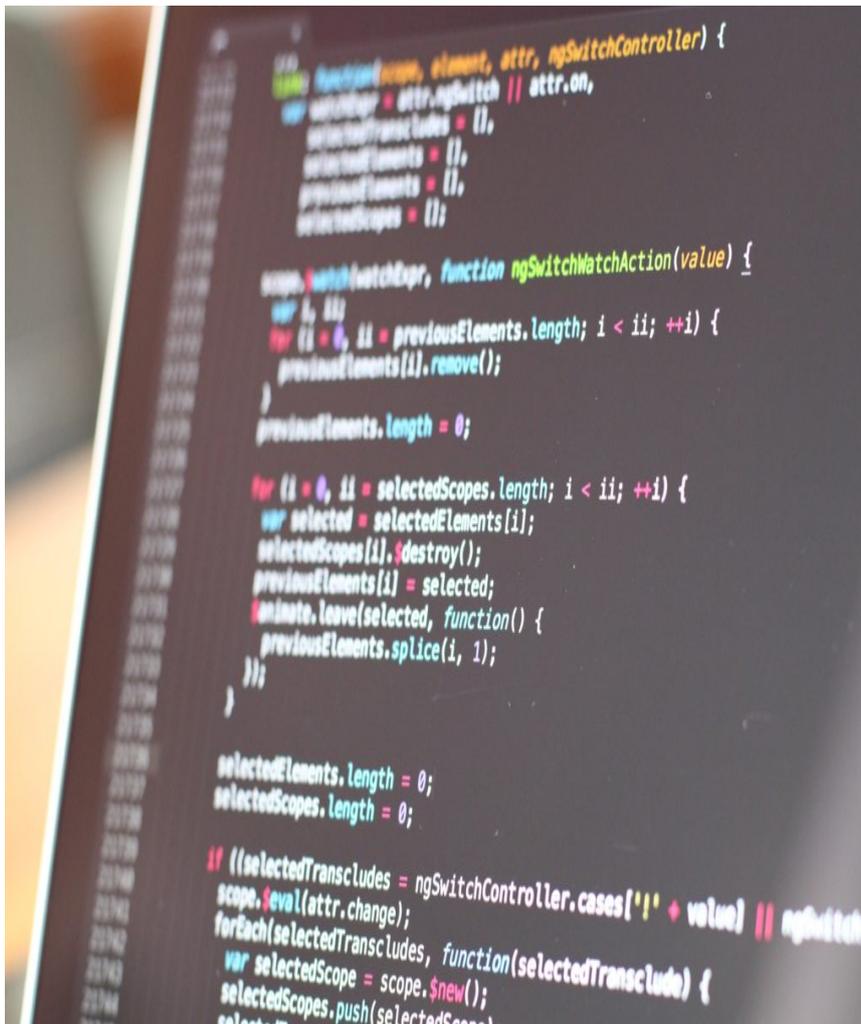
How many of you actually know how they could be applied and what benefits they could bring to our industry? Here are three reasons why APIs can pave the way to a more efficient air cargo industry:

1. They increase business efficiency

Let's take the example of booking a hotel room. Once you have entered your search criteria and clicked on “Search”, the platform aggregates information from many different hotels by interacting with each hotel's API, which delivers results for available rooms that meet your criteria.

Now, let's assume you are a freight forwarding agent – and most probably you are if you are reading this article – who needs to track several shipments. You can call the carriers' customer service and spend quite some time on the phone; or you can use the online tracking tool on the carriers' websites, but then you need to take the time to visit the sites. If you and the carriers you work with use APIs, you can get the results directly on your system. In fact, in the same way as for the hotel booking platform, your system could aggregate the information from many different carriers, saving you both time and money on a day-to-day basis – and having a positive impact on your bottom line. Great, isn't it? Likewise, you can of course get schedule, capacity and handling capability information.

In recent years, EDI messaging has been used for the exchange of security information with the e-CSD, but otherwise there is no industry standard to exchange this information. As long as data is available – in this case, the security information – with an API it is possible to exchange it easily.



At Swiss WorldCargo we are building APIs with our reservation and tracking systems in cooperation with our IT provider Accelya.

2. They are easy to build

Because they are based on a script, APIs are very easy to build and allow users to access data directly, eliminating the need for EDI messages for the interfacing of transportation management systems. **At Swiss WorldCargo, we are building APIs with our reservation and tracking systems in cooperation with our IT provider Accelya.**

3. They enable collaboration across the supply chain

In an industry marked by ever shorter boom and bust cycles, logistics companies must make better use of data to make strategic choices that can carry them through downturns, and which enable them to profit from new trends.

We believe APIs give us the agility needed to incorporate new innovations into our ecosystem with a reduced time to market. This allows us to constantly look for new opportunities and revise our business model to continually provide added value for your business. It allows us to launch new concepts, incorporating new day-to-day consumer digital experiences into our cargo business. We have invested in democratizing our data in real time and giving you access to new services through APIs – to further improve the efficiency and speed of your business

operations.

More information at accelya.com



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