The Challenge:

→ Coordinating global teams and projects was difficult
→ Managing customer feedback needed to be a streamlined team effort
→ Small IT team needed minimal IT hassles

The Solution:

→ Lightning fast deployment of custom applications – in minutes
→ Robust applications with no IT maintenance challenges
→ Cost-effective solution – no upfront investment hurdles

The Results:

→ Distributed, real-time access to project status for internal and external team members
→ Open communication among outside developers
→ A comprehensive, patent-pending customer-feedback system
→ More efficient operations with open reporting

As the Web’s new-breed travel-search site, Kayak.com aims to provide the most complete real-time information – pricing and availability – on flights, hotels, auto rentals, and other travel options to thousands of site visitors each day. With a large majority of the customer service, operations and development work completed at the U.S. headquarters in Concord, MA, there was still a need for an efficient way to coordinate and collaborate with employees and partners in Europe, India, and China. That places a premium on coordinating and managing these distributed teams.

“Updating and exchanging huge single-user spreadsheets among dozens of people just wasn’t an option for us,” said Jim Giza, director of technology for Kayak.com. “We had too many people who needed visibility into project data and statuses. Our teams need speed and efficiency.”

Another key area to address: efficiently responding to customer feedback. Kayak.com receives dozens of messages each day. “We consider this feedback to be an early-warning window into our customer base,” Giza said. “For instance, if there’s a travel provider who’s not performing or if our updated interface isn’t working on a Safari browser for Macintosh computers, we need to know those things as soon as possible. With such a diverse range of issues to address, our philosophy is that every Kayak employee is a customer-service rep – but we needed an efficient way to get these messages to different employees for them to respond in a timely manner. We outsource our site hosting, so there isn’t a lot of internal resources we can tap into. We needed solutions that would be easy and efficient.”

From its first days as a company, Kayak.com embraced the simplicity and power of Intuit QuickBase to automate a variety of business processes and workflows – from managing resumes of employee candidates to managing the selection and build-out of its offices. With QuickBase, Kayak.com workgroups and teams can collaborate online through easy – yet sophisticated – centrally managed applications that boost productivity, streamline workflow, promote visibility and establish accountability. Best of all, QuickBase is managed by Intuit, which means there is no IT infrastructure to buy, deploy, or maintain. “We’ve been big QuickBase fans from the beginning – it’s so flexible, you can use it for so many things,” Giza said.

So it wasn’t surprising that Giza turned to QuickBase for solutions to manage global projects and customer service issues. “With QuickBase, I can develop an idea and have a robust application to automate a key business function in 10-15 minutes,” he said. “I can prototype, develop, and
deploy at lightning speeds. And there's nothing to deploy or install for users – they just go to a Web address and can begin using the system immediately.

“From an administrative perspective, there's nothing that can touch QuickBase, and since we don't have an IT department, that’s an important consideration. Normally these kinds of global applications would require lengthy waits and expenses while you purchase and/or configure servers, firewalls, IP addresses, backup procedures, and those issues. With QuickBase, we're up and running in minutes.”

Kayak.com relies on QuickBase to help it manage the global internal/external development experts who build and maintain the company's Web site. “We use QuickBase as a rendezvous mechanism where all of our team can check in with their latest status, issues, questions, and other collaborative communications,” Giza said. “We have hundreds of people sharing this information 24/7 around the world – quickly and securely. We can see which partners have done what work – and compensate them accordingly.”

In addition, Giza recalls that, “In the past three years, we have successfully commissioned and completed over 100 non-critical path projects with outside developers while relying on QuickBase as the main communication engine - giving us up-to-the-minute status on the progress of each initiative.”

Giza also used the simple creation/customization capabilities of QuickBase to create a sophisticated customer-service application as well. “Yes, I could have bought some wildly expensive customer-management system,” he said. “But they don’t do nearly as much as what I can do with QuickBase. When a customer message comes in, we can automatically analyze its contents and route it to a Kayak person for immediate attention. So Sally gets questions about passwords. Tom gets questions about credit cards. Or Steve gets the questions about hotel sales. Each employee gets a couple of messages a day by e-mail – and it’s all tracked in QuickBase. The recipient gets the e-mail, clicks the link, and goes to the QuickBase record where he or she gets complete details about the issue including the thread history. We think our system is so innovative, we even completed a patent application for it.”

Giza was also quick to note the importance of QuickBase’s ability to easily work with third-party tools for comprehensive reporting. “Yes, we use QuickBase’s native reporting features,” he said. “But we also recognize that Excel is the native tongue of business folks. So we like the openness of QuickBase to push some of our data to other tools for sophisticated charting and graphing.”

“QuickBase gives us a level of speed and flexibility in automating key business processes that we can’t get anywhere else. Combined with its cost-effectiveness and outsourced management by Intuit, QuickBase is a perfect solution for Kayak.com.”