

Thalys: right on track to delivering a beautiful online experience

Find out how Europe's high-speed train operator moved towards a direct-to-consumer model and how we're supporting them achieve their online payment goals.

In 2020, the high-speed train company made a major strategic shift by taking over the distribution and direct sale of Thalys tickets. We spoke with its IT Directors, Juliette du Roscoat Atencia and Erick Cuvelier, and its Marketing & Sales Director, Bruno Dierickx, to better understand this development and the advantages of our partnership.

Welcome to the world of Thalys

The result of a strong, sustainable, and multicultural European vision from its inception, Thalys is preparing to celebrate its 25th anniversary in June 2021. Progressively, it has gained in maturity in relation to its status as a railway company.

For about twenty years, Thalys was above all a commercial brand. Train management, distribution, and ticket sales remained the prerogative of its two main shareholders SNCF and SNCB. At the end of 2015, it took over all railway operations and evolved into a fully-fledged railway company under the name THI Factory. In 2020, they added the final piece to the puzzle and became its own distributor and started selling its train tickets directly on its own digital channels (websites, mobile applications). Today, it has two train brands and two websites dedicated to reservations: *Thalys* and its low-cost little brother *IZY*.

"Welcome to our world" is more than a slogan. For Thalys it represents their primary corporate concern: guaranteeing the best possible welcome to its customers. Hence this new direct-to-consumer strategy which aims to meet two major ambitions: to build a stronger relationship with its passengers and to simplify sales and after-sales.



A journey that starts with an online payment

Before 2020, reservations and payments were managed by SNCF and SNCB. By becoming its own distributor, Thalys' challenge was to offer the best possible customer experience online. To achieve this, it decided to surround itself with digitally native partners, experts in the online experience. Hence the choice of Adyen, which guaranteed simple integration of payments into the customer journey.

We chose Adyen because we wanted to surround ourselves with partners who integrate digital into the depths of their solutions.

Erick Cuvelier, CIO, Thalys

Another advantage of choosing Adyen is that it complies with new regulations from the outset. Thanks to a native 3D Secure 2 server, strong customer authentication is only triggered when necessary. According to Juliette du Roscoat Atencia: "With Adyen, we did not have to manage PSD2 compliance, which was reassuring for our finance department. We can open up payment methods and solutions without taking many risks, which gives us more freedom from a commercial point of view."

Managing payments also means managing the risk of fraud and chargebacks. Our teams worked with Thalys to refine their fraud rules with the aim of ensuring the best balance between blocking fraudulent transactions and authorizing legitimate payments. A strategy that is already bearing fruit for Bruno Dierickx, Thalys' Sales Director: "The choice of Adyen was important in terms of fraud, which is very reasonable, but also in terms of the complete range of payment methods."

A stronger connection to passengers

With this direct sales strategy, Thalys' connection with its customers is now much stronger and the company is striving to ensure the best experience and comfort for its passengers before, during, and after the journey. This also includes the payment experience. At the point of sale, Adyen ensures a frictionless online purchase journey. For a transportation company operating across four countries, it was essential to offer the most common local payment methods in its four markets: *Cartes Bancaires* in France, *SOFORT* and *PayPal* in Germany, *Bancontact* in Belgium, and *iDEAL* in the Netherlands. It was also necessary to accept foreign e-wallets such as *WeChatPay*, one of the preferred methods of payment for Chinese tourists. Now all of their customers can pay with their preferred payment method.

We wanted to offer the best customer experience online. With Adyen, one of the benefits of becoming our own digital distributor was to offer our customers all payment methods wherever they are.

Bruno Dierickx, Marketing & Sales Director, Thalys

Another advantage of direct distribution has been the ability to resolve cross-selling concerns across the four Thalys markets. From now on, after-sales service is guaranteed to be stress-free for the customer because all payments are managed by Thalys through Adyen.

Finally, Thalys also has complete control over its payment data. With our online payment solution, they can manage the relationship with their customers regardless of the device or payment method used. This is a key asset that enables the railway operator to optimize every aspect of the purchasing process.

Two partners on the same track

Another reason for choosing Adyen for Thalys was the transparent per-transaction pricing system, which makes it possible to clearly see the charges for each payment.

Thanks to a fully variable model, Adyen's success is its customer's success, and vice versa.

Erick Cuvelier, IT Director, Thalys

From the start of the partnership, we have been working hand in hand on a daily basis with the various Thalys departments involved in payments, including the finance teams, who also testify: "The Adyen teams are available and we benefit from documentation and online tools that help us to develop."



For the future, Thalys remains full of ambitions to remain at the forefront of digitalization and we will continue to support them in their projects. Among its new challenges, Thalys will seek to capitalize on the ecommerce payment experience to simplify the purchasing of train tickets during the journey.

One thing is certain: Thalys digitalization process is already receiving plaudits, in 2020 it was awarded the *Corporate IT Award* for its agility in terms of digital strategy. Bruno Dierickx, Thalys' Commercial Director, is delighted: "By surrounding ourselves with natively digital partners like Adyen, we have been able to reconcile our culture of customer experience and our online world with a single desire: to always remain at the service of the traveler."