Success: Casetta Sistemi

PROFILE

Cassetta Sistemi srl was founded in Imola, Italy, in 1980, and is now one of the main software houses providing business software in the area. The company now employs 25 skilled professionals and distributes and supports its own business software to over 2000 users.

Problem

Since the beginning Cassetta Sistemi has built its software using COBOL as the programming language and a specialized file system to provide data storage. In 1980 using COBOL and its file system was one of the few viable choices to build business systems.

As the years passed the original COBOL programs have been recompiled in order to run on different platforms and today Cassetta Sistemi has over 3000 programs that run under MS Windows, some with a GUI, many other still in character mode. What has not changed is the underlying file system, since moving to relational data storage would have forced the company into rewriting all the programs from scratch. Nonetheless, the market is now asking for web-enabled and GUI applications based on a relational database. The goals that Cassetta Sistemi must reach are:

- Rapid development of GUI applications that run against a relational database.
- Reuse of standard business modules and logic.
- Ease of maintenance of developed applications and definition of company-wide standards.

Solution

Cassetta Sistemi decided to start developing business application using Visual Basic and MS SQL Server. This choice was made after an extensive research of business-oriented languages and tools. A pilot project was set up in order to test the new technology and to let developers build a reusable framework to develop 3-tier applications. In order to meet the goals outlined above some kind of tool was needed to support development. The options were to develop such tool internally or to acquire a 3rd party tool that could produce understandable and solid source code. An evaluation of 3rd party products was set up in order to assess how each product took care to the following needs:

- Speed up the creation of business object starting from database tables, automating routine and repetitive tasks.

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- Provide standard forms that could serve as a base for further programming.
- Generate understandable and well-documented code that could be easily modified, with no black boxes.
- Hide the complexity of data handling for junior developers.
- Help the company to set standards for business software development.
- Provide a short learning curve.
- Save time and money compared to internal development of a custom tool.

Several tools were taken under consideration, and Visible System's Visible Developer was deemed the one that best suited the company's needs. Visible Developer made generating business objects a snap and the generated forms provided a great starting point for further development. The generated code was so cleverly engineered that the development team was able to build ActiveX components that took Visible Developer-generated business objects as input to provide advanced end-user functionality such as look-up tables. Even the less experienced developers on the team were able to use the business object to build their own forms, thus adhering to a firm standard that was derived from the documentation that comes with Visible Developer.

Benefits

After about one year of development a fairly complex vertical business application was built from scratch. Also, a comprehensive framework was built to serve as starting point for other projects. The fulcrum of Cassetta Sistemi's framework is certainly Visible Developer, which provides the means to extend the framework in a standard way, allowing developers from different teams to exchange objects and to contribute constantly to growth of the company.

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