

A European automaker delivers an improved user experience

IBM Rational software tools modernize, integrate and extend the life of multiple key systems

Overview

The need

A leading European automaker sought to streamline, improve and enhance the quality of the sales process at its dealerships by modernizing its existing vehicle management system application.

The solution

The automaker engaged IBM Business Partner Oxford International to use tools from IBM Rational® software to create a modern, web-based user interface that integrates multiple back-end systems.

The benefit

The new solution improves the customer experience, providing seamlessly integrated access to multiple systems through a single interface that complies with corporate image guidelines.

A leading European automaker sought to streamline, improve and enhance the quality of the sales process at its dealerships. It needed to modernize its existing vehicle management system application, which dealers and importers worldwide use for vehicle distribution, inventory and order management. The company also wanted to add a web-based front end and integrate its car configurator and supporting sales systems through cross-platform integration between its IBM Power Systems™ servers running the IBM i platform, front-end Linux operating system-based servers and back-end IBM System z® servers.

The modernization solution would enable customers and sales staff to select, visually configure, change, order and locate vehicles using a common user interface, regardless of the back-end systems employed. At the same time, the solution would help the automaker improve IT governance and meet strict corporate image guidelines.

Creating a solution that retains existing business logic

The automaker engaged IBM Business Partner Oxford International, one of its long-term IT partners, to help with the modernization project. Oxford International had worked with the automaker for several years on numerous development and integration initiatives, and it offered extensive experience with IBM Rational software.

One of the key technical challenges of the project was retaining the organizational knowledge that had been captured and codified in vehicle management system deployments around the world. Because the business rules were complex, the automaker needed a solution that would reuse,



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—Steve Norton, president, Oxford International

rather than replace, existing resources. To achieve this goal while accelerating development, Oxford International capitalized on IBM Rational Application Developer software with IBM Rational Host Access Transformation Services (HATS) software.

Oxford International developers used Eclipse environment-based Rational Application Developer software to develop Java and Java EE applications and deploy them to the IBM WebSphere® Application Server platform. The Rational HATS application enabled the team to quickly transform the existing system’s 5250 green screen interface into a rich browser-based interface.

Integrating multiple systems to create a seamless user interface

Oxford International also helped the automaker integrate data from multiple front- and back-end systems—including Linux servers, a corporate mainframe, a Java interface to an existing midrange system, an IBM DB2® database and the green screen system. In doing so, Oxford International provided a web-based interface with no client-side software—a solution that eliminated the historical technical challenges of autonomous dealers around the world running different operating systems. The solution provides all the functionality of the old system and includes new features that users had been requesting, such as a single command to select all customer orders or to show stock and changeable orders.

Using Rational Application Developer software made it easy for Oxford International to add resources to the team as needed. “Because Rational Application Developer is based on the industry-standard Eclipse framework, the learning curve for new development resources is greatly reduced. When we needed to scale by bringing in new developers, it was easy to find the required skill sets because many are already familiar with the Eclipse environment. This allowed us to allocate beginning- to intermediate-level Java developers and get them up and running very quickly,” says Steve Norton, president, Oxford International. The application also provided a boost in productivity for more experienced developers.

Solution components:

Software

- IBM Rational® Application Developer for WebSphere®
- IBM Rational Host Access Transformation Services
- IBM WebSphere Application Server
- IBM i

Servers

- IBM Power Systems™
- IBM System z®

IBM Business Partner

- Oxford International
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Delivering an improved customer experience while reducing costs

Using the Rational tools, Oxford International completed the project in just three months. According to Oxford International CEO Anthony Chadwick, Rational HATS software helped his development team save a significant amount of time as it converted the green screen interface to a web-based interface. “Rational HATS software makes legacy modernization a relatively easy and fast process. I estimate that Rational HATS software cut 75 percent of the man-hour requirements from other approaches we have used,” he notes.

The internationalized and language-compliant solution has been rolled out to approximately 7,000 users in North America, Italy, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, the Middle East and Japan. The system is already handling close to 100,000 HTTP transactions per hour during peak traffic.

The Oxford International solution enabled the client to retain the knowledge assets embedded in the existing system and made it possible to extend the application lifecycle of a core business system by years. With the thin-client solution, the automaker was able to eliminate client-side maintenance costs along with a private, secure communications network that was no longer needed.

More important, the system improved the customer experience, providing seamlessly integrated access to multiple systems through a single interface that complies with corporate image guidelines. “We believe the new system makes life easier for the dealers. What matters is the customer experience, and we have helped the client to bring the entire system out of the back office, much closer to the customer,” Chadwick states. Working with a customer, a salesperson can configure the vehicle, locate it and place the order to corporate at the same time.”

For more information

To learn more about modernization solutions from IBM, contact your IBM representative or IBM Business Partner Oxford International at www.oxfordtkg.com, or visit the following website: ibm.com/software/rational/solutions/em/

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