

Intex Consulting Group

Visual COBOL delivers costs savings through flexible multi-cloud deployment options and timesaving developer efficiencies.



Who is Intex Consulting Group?

Intex enables digital transformation of textile production by providing Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) and Manufacturing Execution System (MES) solutions for all textile processes, from supervising machines to managing the company.

Cost Pressures Drive Demand for a Cloud-Ready Solution

The textile industry is one of the most complex industries of our times. This high level of complexity in the textile supply chain can only be managed through digital solutions. With worldwide distribution, Intex Consulting has served this specialized industry since 1985 with its flagship solution written in COBOL and originally deployed to Fujitsu BS2000 mainframes

which were very popular in Germany at that time. Dominik Schischma, Chief Innovation Officer at Intex Consulting, explains: "As the years progressed, we noticed that many of our customers moved from a mainframe and UNIX platforms to Windows because it was more cost-effective to run. We ported our COBOL application to Windows using Micro Focus (now part of OpenText) Net Express and today, 90 percent of our customers run on this platform. We've established strategic partnerships to ensure that we deliver integrated solutions for our customers, giving them end-to-end visibility across their supply chain."

Intex created a real-time integration between SAP and its ERP solution, so that any production planning is directly reflected in SAP with orders and stocks fully synchronized between the systems. This is a great advantage for many larger Intex customers, who rely on SAP to run their general business, but need the more specialized Intex solution to manage their textile business. In recent years, the textile industry has come under a lot of cost pressures. As a result, Intex has seen a strong increase in the demand for a cloud solution, as this typically reduces operating costs compared to an on-premises solution. Because Net Express did not support the latest versions of Windows and the SAP HANA platform edition database did not support a C++ interface, the team looked



At a Glance

- **Industry**
Technology
- **Location**
Germany
- **Challenge**
Respond to customer demand for more flexible application deployment to the cloud, while retaining decades of business intelligence and leveraging existing development skills
- **Products and Services**
Visual COBOL
- **Success Highlights**
 - + Full deployment flexibility with a multi-cloud solution
 - + Easy workload migration to Linux for cost-effective cloud deployment
 - + Decades of critical business intelligence retained and easily extended with .NET
 - + Seamless integration between COBOL and .NET offers a choice of the best of both worlds

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Chief Innovation Officer
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for a new solution that supported the latest operating platforms both in the cloud and on premises while still enabling use of the SAP HANA platform edition database to achieve a full integration with SAP technologies.

Leveraging Existing Development Skills and Modern Platforms with Visual COBOL

The Intex team next looked for options to reuse their COBOL code in .NET. The team saw the .NET platform as the best solution to both easily integrate modern technologies and to expand Intex's SAP integration to the SAP HANA platform edition. They compared Fujitsu NetCOBOL with Visual COBOL. Intex defined a few 'must have' features, such as support for the new .NET versions 5 and 6 and for modern APIs like REST or Cloud Services which are key for essential integration with other solutions. Because it offers a complete and integrated solution to its customers, Intex must also provide e-invoice integration in more and more countries. This requires strong encryption support and adaptation to different requirements depending on each customer's country of location. During a proof-of-concept, they discovered that Visual COBOL provided the best support in these areas, including options for .NET deployment to Linux as well as Windows.

The ability to reuse code containing valuable business intelligence built over decades, swung the decision for Visual COBOL. "We have 12,000 COBOL source files containing millions of lines of code," says Mr. Schischma. "Visual COBOL allowed us to fully leverage our existing development skills and experience in a

step-by-step transformation to the .NET platform. Because it was still COBOL code running in .NET, our developers did not need to reskill and yet they now have full access to the .NET platform and all its libraries. We compiled 97 percent of our existing code automatically with Visual COBOL without any manual intervention. The remaining three percent required some adjustments due to deprecated API calls, but in general all modules were compiled relatively easily."

Cost-Effective Linux Cloud Deployment Options

Thanks to Visual COBOL, by compiling COBOL code to .NET, Intex can now also deploy its applications to Linux as well as Windows. Mr. Schischma comments: "With Visual COBOL we provide our customers with a range of platform and cloud choices. With minimum effort, we can offer our software as a service with any cloud provider chosen by our customers. The Linux platform is the lowest cost option in the cloud and Visual COBOL gives us the flexibility to easily deploy our workload to Linux or Windows, offering a more cost-effective cloud option to our customers depending on their needs."

Development Productivity Improvement

With over 12,000 COBOL source files in the application, the Intex development team opted to use Visual Studio Code for COBOL development. At the time, OpenText was developing a new release of Visual COBOL with support for Visual Studio Code and Mr. Schischma worked directly with OpenText Research and

Development to beta test the new release. He comments: "Our beta experience with Visual COBOL was fantastic, we had a direct line into R&D and our technical suggestions were taken on board. It was great to receive the new version with all the improvements."

The new Visual COBOL version with its support for Visual Studio Code has improved developer productivity with faster editing and debugging support. The Intex team also moved to GitLab at the same time, to provide a comprehensive code version control repository which is fully integrated into the IDE.

Intex developers enjoy the benefits of the .NET platform too, according to Mr. Schischma: "With the .NET libraries now at our fingertips we can complete complex coding tasks with significantly less effort than before. What used to take up to 10 days of programming, is now done in less than three days, representing a 70 percent productivity and cost improvement in system-side areas. Working with .NET COBOL code it is easy to just call a .NET function and fully integrate the .NET world into our solutions."

He concludes: "Although we have a lot of in-house COBOL expertise and managed most of the migration to Visual COBOL ourselves, we appreciated the support of the local Micro Focus (now part of OpenText) technical experts. Today, we offer full flexibility to our customers enabling them to respond quickly to the ever-changing market conditions in the textile industry."