AQUILON SOFTWARE: IMPROVED DEVELOPMENT PRODUCTIVITY
Visual COBOL: Enabling faster IT service delivery

AQUILON SOFTWARE

URL: www.aquilonsoftware.com
Industry: Software
Country: USA and Canada

Highlights

- 10% increased developer productivity
- Streamlined application version control
- Enhanced debugging process saves time
- Faster and simplified application deployment

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CTO, Aquilon Software

At a Glance: Aquilon Software

Aquilon Software develops, implements and supports ERP systems for small and medium-sized businesses. Adopting these systems enables organizations to boost efficiencies, improve customer service, asset allocation and enjoy cost management benefits. The net result is an improved bottom line and the promise of profitable business growth.

Solution

- Micro Focus Visual COBOL for Visual Studio
- Micro Focus COBOL Server
- AccuRev

Challenge

Aquilon's ERP solution is typical of many ERP products – large, complex, and containing over four million lines of code. There are 5,000 programs and thousands of information screens. Despite its size and complexity, this ERP system provides business-critical functions to the organizations every day.

The Aquilon client base is mainly small to medium manufacturing and distribution organizations requiring support for internal business processes, such as accounting, administration, budgeting, sales, sales analysis and business intelligence (BI), customer (CRM) and supplier relationship (SRM) management. Other functions include purchasing, inventory, supply chain, costing and manufacturing. The advantage of the Aquilon ERP system is seamless integration between its many business functions. Master data and transactions are entered once and used throughout the system, minimizing duplicate data entry and improving data accuracy.

This system was built on Micro Focus COBOL using the Micro Focus Net Express and Server Express toolsets for application development and maintenance. The Aquilon ERP application solution has evolved from traditional terminal emulation access to a fully interactive, Windows-based user interface.

Greg Condon, Aquilon CTO explains why an upgrade to Visual COBOL made sense: "Our development environment was based on Micro Focus tooling, which required a learning curve for new developers. We had been watching Visual COBOL and felt confident that the new environment and features support would help us make our developers more productive, faster. We saw more opportunities to enhance our development and delivery processes and the industry-standard IDE, within Visual COBOL, won us over."

Visual COBOL as the natural next step

The Aquilon ERP application was moved to Visual COBOL and soon all development took place in a new Windows-based environment. Although the benefits override any implementation challenges, with a product of this size the transition to Visual COBOL can always introduce certain unexpected issues, as Condon observes: "We worked extensively with Micro Focus in testing Visual COBOL to confirm its alignment with our development requirements. This team collaboration allowed us to influence the Micro Focus product roadmap and deliver a robust solution aligned to our business needs."

AccuRev to streamline version control

Aquilon has also been using AccuRev, the Borland enterprise version control solution, for 10+ years to record all the development changes made to the Aquilon ERP source code. Because not all customers are on the same ERP software version, it is important to be able to determine how the product was configured and built at a particular point in time. Condon explains: "When we looked into a version control solution, AccuRev was the only product which supported both UNIX and Windows environments which was very important for us. Before AccuRev we would do manual versioning which was very labor-intensive and not always accurate. AccuRev gives us a central repository for all of our source code and it's been incredibly reliable. It's also helped us in our code review process, as senior developers can now easily review the work of more junior developers, contributing to the seamless delivery of a higher quality product."

Boosting developer productivity

The development benefits of Visual COBOL were immediately apparent as Condon explains: "It's Visual Studio! New developers start with a familiar environment and the IDE is highly configurable, making development with Visual COBOL much more productive."

Working with Visual COBOL is paying off for Aquilon in a number of ways. Global code base searches are made easier, facilitating faster access to source code search information – a great mechanism to understand impact analysis. The build process is also enhanced by displaying errors, warnings or info messages in an on-screen error list. Double-clicking these notifications expands the flagged code issue, enabling immediate, real-time corrective action.

The Aquilon team is very enthusiastic about the enhanced debugging. Condon: "This is a big step up from prior debugging capabilities and very easy to use. Setting breakpoints within the debugging process is one example of this configurable capability. The powerful toolset enables users to suspend execution where and when required, streamlining the development and test process."

Deployment made easy

As an ISV, Aquilon is faced with the challenge of application deployment to its end users. A typical client has 8-10 PCs, all of which need the Aquilon ERP application to be installed and configured separately. Each time a PC is replaced, upgraded, or re-installed the same process must be repeated. This deployment process was quite cumbersome and resource-intensive.

The latest version of Visual COBOL has solved this issue for Aquilon and delivered a streamlined deployment process for its end users, as Condon explains: "With Micro Focus we now have support for a new application deployment and management capability. This capability enables a central location for run-time installation and licensing information, as well as multiple run-time versions. This means there is no software to install on a client's PC. We just set up an application shortcut which is associated to a designated server and it executes the client's application without issue, creating a much simpler deployment process for us. This Visual COBOL deployment solution delivers massive time savings and allows us to better serve our customers."

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A platform for the future

Condon concludes: "The support we've received from Micro Focus during this process has been second to none. The SupportLine staff is excellent, their responses are timely and they are very knowledgeable. With our development productivity at an all-time high, our builds as reliable as ever and with a stable run-time environment, we feel ready for the future. Visual COBOL is evolving and each new version brings something that helps us improve productivity even further."

Contact us at: www.microfocus.com