Avis Europe

Avis Europe PLC is using Micro Focus® OnWeb as the core of an extranet application that gives licensed car rental agencies simultaneous access to a mainframe-based reservation system and other data sources.

Overview
Avis Europe runs car rental branches across Western Europe and administers a network of agencies throughout Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia.

Challenge
"The problem we faced when dealing with licensees in remote, and especially developing locations, was that our reservation system, called 'Wizard', which Avis Europe shares with its U.S. counterpart, is a highly complex green screen mainframe application," explained Mike Moore, vice president information services, Avis Europe. "The cost and physical difficulty of installing the network infrastructure and proprietary

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MIKE MOORE
Vice President Information Services
Avis Europe

dumb terminals necessary to install it in these countries would have been phenomenal. This expense would have been compounded by the need for extensive training before operators could use the green screen application. Although the licensees are profitable, the relatively low economies-of-scale operating in developing countries mean that this kind of outlay could not be justified in terms of ROI."

The issue of training is a serious obstacle in a number of countries because of the seasonal nature of their car rental business. For instance, in countries that rely on tourism for their business, transactions are carried out over a short period of time and the reservation system is used infrequently for the remainder of the year. During this period of inactivity, users might forget the complexities of the green screen application, and require expensive retraining before the next busy period.

These difficulties led to a situation in which licensees had to telex, fax, or email Avis' corporate headquarters every time they wanted to book a reservation and await a response before being able to confirm the booking for the customer. This clearly needed to be addressed because it was inefficient, but also because of the potentially detrimental effect of such a lengthy and laborious process on customer relations.

AVIS

At a Glance

- **Industry**
  Transportation

- **Location**
  United Kingdom

- **Challenge**
  The cost of accessing the Avis reservation system was prohibitively high for licensees in remote locations.

- **Solution**
  Use OnWeb to deliver easy web access to the reservation system from any PC with a browser and an Internet connection.

- **Results**
  + Improved business functionality
  + Eliminated expensive employee training
  + Increased revenues through ability to run a more distributed operation
  + Improved customer satisfaction and loyalty

Solution

An Avis team proposed a web-based solution that would enable licensees to access the reservation system from any PC with an Internet connection and standard web browser. Avis short-listed three software products that could potentially provide this link to the mainframe application. Following a thorough evaluation, which included the development of a prototype system, Avis chose Micro Focus's OnWeb product.

OnWeb enabled Avis to gather data simultaneously from virtually any data store, perform business logic and processing to create new information, then make it available to any desktop using browsers or existing thick-client applications. The technical architecture of Avis' project also included a firewall and Microsoft IIS Server running SSL (secure sockets layer) to ensure system security and to control user access to the application. User information is stored in a Microsoft Access database and a Satelcom mainframe gateway completes the connection to the 'Wizard' mainframe application.

Using OnWeb, the Avis licensee project took four months from inception to its first rollout. Since then, the implementation has expanded to cover licensees in 23 countries in the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe. The complete rollout will include forty countries—ten more than identified in the original investment case. With OnWeb, remote agents make a secure web connection to the reservation system on Avis's corporate intranet. Reservations are then made online in real time, based on up-to-the-minute fleet information.

Results

"The beauty of the extranet application," continued Moore, "is that users don't need any proprietary hardware or software to access it. Nor do they need special training to use it—the functionality traditionally accessed through tortuously complex green screens is presented in an intuitive web page format by OnWeb. This ease of rollout and use is emphasized by the fact that in the vast majority of the countries so far enabled, the implementation has been performed by the local directors, with no need to send out Corporate Information Services staff.

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"Paradoxically, this centralization is enabling us to run a more distributed operation," Moore concluded. "The project's success is exceeding all our expectations. The users took to the application quickly and are using it more than we had expected. It is handling higher data volumes than we had originally envisaged, while maintaining its performance. Most importantly, it's making a real difference to the way licensees do business."

About Micro Focus

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