

Independent Distributor

Visual COBOL and Relativity modernize application development with new tools and real-time, relational access to COBOL data

Overview

This company is an independent distributor in North America. With multiple locations in the USA servicing the world with over 170 employees, the company specializes in being customer-focused and exceeding expectations.

Challenge

COBOL is crucial to running its operations. From handling customer orders, to inventory control, purchasing, bill of materials, accounts receivable/payable, general ledger, and production, every element of the business is controlled by COBOL programs. Shipping nearly 450,000 items each year, and managing over 200,000 inventory items across different

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IT MANAGER

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locations in different states, calls for sophisticated IT support.

The company moved from Micro Focus® Object COBOL (OCDS) to Server Express, but its IT Manager still struggled with some limitations: "Our application users were limited to 24x80 screens which meant lots of navigating between screens to complete actions. We felt a more modern development IDE would help us design a user-friendly and efficient interface. We also noticed an increase in demand for querying our COBOL data for reporting purposes. We used Open Database Connectivity (ODBC) drivers to access and extract data, but this could only give us a snapshot in time, when we really wanted near real-time and relational access to data to share with our Window applications. Finally, more recent hires in our IT department were not familiar with COBOL, and we looked for a development environment where we could leverage our 25 year COBOL investment, and yet attract a new generation of developers."

The company maintained over 1,000 COBOL programs, containing 1,700,000 LOC (Lines of Code) while also sharing macros. The IT team wanted to improve both the end-user and developer experience.



At a Glance

■ Industry

Distribution and manufacturing

■ Location

USA

■ Challenge

Moving to a more modern development IDE to deliver a user-friendly GUI. The company also needed real-time and relational access to its COBOL application data.

■ Products and Services

Micro Focus Visual COBOL for Eclipse
Micro Focus Relativity

■ Results

- + Enhanced editing and debugging capabilities
- + New user-friendly GUI increased end user productivity
- + Real-time, relational access to COBOL data files for reporting purposes
- + Full code visibility across development lifecycle

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Solution

Its long history with Micro Focus, and its deep investment in COBOL which it didn't want to risk losing, convinced the company to look at Visual COBOL. The development team had been using vi editor, the default editor that comes with the UNIX operating system, on its Linux machine. This did not keep version history and wasn't suitable going forward. Visual COBOL for Eclipse provides advanced COBOL editing and debugging tools. Its continuous background compilation code analysis, code search, and remote compile, and debugging streamline application delivery for the development team.

The move to Visual COBOL was well considered and the company chose to engage a Micro Focus consultant for a week to help familiarize the IT team with the new toolset. After setting up a test environment and ironing out any issues, Visual COBOL proved a wonderful solution, giving the team a whole new set of business practices for editing, testing, and troubleshooting its COBOL applications. The IT Manager comments: "We have integrated Visual COBOL with Microsoft Source Control so that we now know exactly who is editing what, along with a record of any code modifications."

Users saw their change requests implemented faster because Visual COBOL for Eclipse enabled the development team to deploy tested changes without having to wait for the full system to compile and launch. This allows the team to respond more rapidly to business requirements.

The team then turned their focus to the reporting issue. They wanted to eliminate using third

party software to share COBOL data with the Windows applications. The IT Manager explains further: "We were excited by the launch of XDDBC but it was rather limited and didn't offer a 64 bit version to run on our Windows server. Further research led us to Micro Focus Relativity."

Relativity brings the benefits of modern relational database access to COBOL applications. It presents COBOL data files as a relational data source, enabling the company to take full advantage of modern analytics and reporting tools to enhance the data processing capabilities of COBOL applications. Rather than replicated copies, Relativity provides real-time, SQL-based, relational data access to COBOL data files. The end user sees exactly the same data at exactly the same time as the COBOL application.

Results

End users are enjoying the benefits of more efficient screens and new features. Using the Visual COBOL toolset, new applications are designed to interact with COBOL data more seamlessly and efficiently. The IT Manager comments: "The development team love the editing and debugging benefits Visual COBOL has given them. We now have greater visibility across the development lifecycle, including full history for auditing purposes."

He concludes: "The combination of Visual COBOL and Relativity has given us a great set of solutions to help meet current and future needs for information access, and ease of data entry. We are delighted with the Micro Focus support, and look forward to our ongoing partnership."