

Interactive Systems, Inc. (ISI-Exeter)

Micro Focus Acu4GL delivers fast and flexible deployment from data files to multiple RDBMS.

Overview

Interactive Systems, Inc. (ISI-Exeter) creates warehouse management software solutions and provides quality services for organizations that have sophisticated, unique and high-throughput warehousing requirements. The ISI-Exeter products also include a comprehensive financial management system for public and private sector organizations.

Challenge

ISI-Exeter delivers COBOL-based Exeter WMS (Warehouse Management System), an online, user-friendly system with a broad set of capabilities for planning, controlling, and monitoring distribution center activities. Initially this was developed as an IBM iSeries solution.

“We view Acu4GL as the behind-the-scenes magic that makes our solutions work with any relational database our customers require. It would have taken us years and years to achieve the same thing through a manual rewrite effort.”

DENNIS CHARLES

Senior Vice President
ISI-Exeter

Responding to customer demand, a re-hosting project delivered a UNIX version.

To maintain the reliability and availability of the application in a UNIX environment, ISI-Exeter realized relational database integration would be necessary. The WMS development division joined forces with the ISI-Exeter department which had developed a COBOL-based financial management system. FASBE Financial Accounting Solutions for Business and Education is a comprehensive collection of software subsystems designed to provide a complete, flexible, and straightforward financial management solution. FASBE was designed as a DEC VMS system and its customers were interested in integrating with a relational database—Microsoft SQL.

George Goulet, Director of Sales at ISI-Exeter, explains the difficulty: “With nearly three million lines of codes in the applications, and a small development team, rewriting the code bases to the new desired target database platforms would just have been a mammoth task. The solutions are mission-critical to our customers, many of whom are on a 24/7 support contract with us, and we just couldn’t risk any downtime. Our WMS product is also heavily customized for each customer, making it more complex to change the code base. We wanted to find a way to leverage the existing code to support



At a Glance

Industry

Software and Technology

Location

U.S.A.

Challenge

Using an RDBMS solution, meet customer expectations for application reliability and availability on distributed platforms and offer customers a choice of RDBMS vendors. ISI-Exeter needed a RDBMS solution which could be implemented with minimal application change.

Products and Services

Micro Focus Acu4GL

Success Highlights

- + Improved business continuity with high-availability and recoverability capability
- + Support for the latest RDBMS platforms
- + Enhanced reporting capabilities, including dynamic self-service reporting
- + Lower business risk through re-use of application logic
- + Reduced application complexity by creating a single codebase to support multiple RDBMS platforms

"Acu4GL supported the desired range of database platforms, and was compatible with our approach: generic code; automated code conversion; and minimal, localized, conditional variations to adapt to each platform. It aligned perfectly with our IT strategy to meet our customer's demand."

DICK BUHLE
Director of Development
ISI-Exeter

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different platforms and continue to extract value from our assets with minimal effort."

Solution

Thorough market research found that Micro Focus Acu4GL could provide a solution. Acu4GL provides integration between standard COBOL ISAM type syntax and relational database management systems (RDBMS) with minimal change to the COBOL applications.

Dick Buhle, Director of Development at ISI-Exeter, comments: "Acu4GL supported the desired range of database platforms, and was compatible with our approach: generic code; automated code conversion; and minimal, localized, conditional variations to adapt to each platform. It aligned perfectly with our IT strategy to meet our customer's demand."

With support from Micro Focus, the Acu4GL implementation was soon underway. The two applications came from different source platforms and were moving to different target platforms, but essentially all code moved through automated conversion tools with Acu4GL dynamically adapting traditional ISAM file IO techniques to SQL in order to access the new target RDBMS. Because WMS is a customized solution, each customer was converted in turn. This process was totally transparent to the customers and didn't result in any loss of productivity.

Buhle recalls the working relationship between ISI-Exeter and Micro Focus during the project: "Acu4GL is easy to get started with and we were able to get most of the way ourselves. When we needed some support Micro Focus

was there for us and the documentation was a great help too. We liked the fact that we could keep the same code base and yet move to a new database platform, leveraging improved data management as well as administration tasks such as backup and scaling."

Reporting is critical for ISI-Exeter and the ability to query COBOL data independent of the COBOL programs has enabled the team to extend a dynamic self-service reporting function to its customers. Executive dashboards are well received too.

Results

Using Acu4GL has improved development productivity for ISI-Exeter, especially compared to having to support multiple separate code bases for different platforms. Buhle comments: "Our iSeries developers didn't need to change their working practices, as the coding is still done in the familiar COBOL environment, and yet we can leverage all the great benefits of relational databases to meet our customers' IT strategy requirements. This flexibility to target different RDBMS platforms with minimal code changes has been a key benefit for us."

Dennis Charles, Senior Vice President at ISI-Exeter, sums the benefit up nicely by saying: "We view Acu4GL as the behind-the-scenes magic that makes our solutions work with any relational database our customers require. It would have taken us years and years to achieve the same thing through a manual rewrite effort. Acu4GL has proven a stable product for us; our customers are happy and that means we are too."