

LUMBERMENS MERCHANDISING CORPORATION: ACCELERATED APPLICATION PERFORMANCE

Visual COBOL improves application performance by 75% delivering new capability and uniting development teams



LMC
Building Business Together.

URL: www.lmc.net
Industry: Construction
Country: USA

Highlights

- 75% application performance increase
- ROI within 24 months
- Reuse of core COBOL business transactions
- Standardizing on a single development environment – Microsoft Visual Studio
- Improved development team collaboration and productivity

“Moving to Visual COBOL delivered measurable performance gains for our applications. We are seeing significant performance increases of up to 75%. Our business systems are running much faster.”

Dave McCann,
Programming and Operations Supervisor, LMC

At a glance: Lumbermens Merchandising Corporation

Lumbermens Merchandising Corporation (LMC) is a cooperative formed in the 1930s by several lumber dealers that wanted to buy more competitively and increase operational efficiency. Today, the resulting corporation has over 365 shareholder companies and annual sales exceeding two and a half billion dollars.

Solution

- Visual COBOL for Visual Studio
- COBOL Server

Business challenge

LMC’s business requires intensive financial and accounting controls. Over one million invoices each year are processed from building material suppliers and billed out to its member companies. Accounts receivable, accounts payable and general ledger applications are key to running the business. The entire platform consists of 300 COBOL batch programs, in addition to six online, user-driven applications. All systems were hosted on a Unisys mainframe.

Dave McCann, Programming and Operations Supervisor for LMC, comments: “Although the mainframe provided us with a good platform and a stable OS, our operational costs for this platform were increasing. Other parts of the organization were running more modern, Windows platforms. Our strategy was to standardize and align our enterprise architectures. We wanted to migrate our business applications off the Unisys mainframe while leveraging all the COBOL business logic we had developed over the years.”

Visual COBOL – the market leading solution

While searching for a solution, McCann explains: “It was important that our chosen solution would be around for the long term so market share was a key deciding factor for us. Having chosen Micro Focus Visual COBOL we found it to be a market leading and superior product which validated our decision.”

A comparative performance test was carried out across both the current and target environments. The initial test had taken 20 minutes to execute on the Unisys mainframe. Using Visual COBOL, deployed on a Windows platform, the same program test took just two minutes to execute - a massive performance gain, which gave LMC the confidence to move forward with this project.

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Functionality enhancements

Working with implementation partner Transvive, LMC also decided to enhance certain UI-driven applications. "We wanted to deliver a more efficient, easy-to-use UI experience for our business users. Prior to this project, these users would have jumped back and forth between many screens, to navigate this application. After a deeper assessment of end user screen requirements, the team implemented a set of new shortcuts to increase end user productivity and simplify navigation without drastically changing the look and feel. LMC utilized Microsoft Windows Presentation Foundation (WPF) as the technology to enhance its user interface. This was easy to do with Visual Studio and Visual COBOL," comments McCann.

A focus on Application Testing

McCann believes the project's success is largely due to the focus on testing. "Every COBOL program and system was tested extensively, at the code and the user interaction level. Due to this careful attention to detail, there were only minor issues during the go-live period which could be easily resolved. There were also no interruptions to the business operations throughout the delivery of this project which ensured ongoing business continuity."

A single development platform

By bringing development practices in line with LMC's other development group – standardizing on the Visual Studio development environment- it now has access to new innovative technologies. McCann: "The Unisys platform wasn't conducive to innovation at all. Everybody uses WinForms and Web applications and we wanted to bring that power and usability to our mainframe applications while maintaining years of business logic and without impacting the business operation."

In addition to architecture improvements, LMC also saw a step improvement in its user interface. Using Visual COBOL for Visual Studio new capabilities were available, such as building list views and preview displays, none of which were possible on the prior platform. It has bridged a number of functionality gaps and delivered an improved user interface for the end users.

Moving to Visual COBOL delivers measurable performance gains, as McCann explains: "We are seeing performance increases of up to 75%. Our business systems are running much faster in the Windows environment. Business transactions that once took hours to complete are now executing in only minutes. Implementing small, precision changes in both our COBOL application and in our database environment, have led to big performance improvements. We are very happy with these results."

Positioned for future success

LMC plans to retire the mainframe within a year. McCann: "Instead of purchasing another mainframe, which was an option we considered, we moved to a more modern operating platform built for the future. Visual COBOL delivered us a full ROI within 24 months, as well as ongoing cost savings down the line. Re-platforming our COBOL business application, using Visual COBOL, was a more cost effective strategy for our business."

McCann concludes: "Our journey with Visual COBOL has brought our development teams closer together, allowed us to realize significant cost savings and increased our application performance, and as a result our service to our business and customers. We are delighted with the results."

About Micro Focus

Micro Focus, a member of the FTSE 250, provides innovative software that allows companies to dramatically improve the business value of their enterprise applications. Micro Focus Enterprise Application Modernization, Testing and Management software enables customers' business applications to respond rapidly to market changes and embrace modern architectures with reduced cost and risk.

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