ROMÃO CALÇADOS: BIG SHOES TO FILL
From opportunity to income stream with Visual COBOL

URL: www.romao.com.br
Industry: Retail
Country: Brazil

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Mauro Cancellieri, IT manager

Founded in 1963 in Brazil, major shoe retailer Romão Calçados has developed a solid reputation – and managed 50 years of successful trading – in identifying and developing opportunities in the larger shoe size market. But when they wanted to talk to their customers online, using the Internet, they soon realized that their systems weren't even talking to each other. Mauro Cancellieri, IT manager, told us more...

"We had spotted the potential to sell our shoes on the internet – even a niche market can be huge on such a platform. Our first store was only 60m^2 and like many stores who have grown from modest beginnings; our systems have incrementally grown rather than being designed for growth from the outset. When we looked into it, we realised our systems just weren't talking to each other!"

Conflicting programs

The two major considerations were a third-party software program, E-commerce by Ikeda, and a separate system that controlled inventory, finance and so on. While both were industry standard architectures, each required a lot of tedious, customer input not what was needed for a market where our rivals were offering maximum functionality with very few clicks.

The business applications needed to be re-purposed with a fresh programming language – including Java or C# – but this required a skillset and/or additional developer resources that Romão Calçados didn't have. It wanted to do more with what it had without risking the stability of its operations or integrity of its data.

Cancellieri comments: "We'd selected Microsoft Internet Information Server (IIS) for our modern web architecture using existing ISAM files for customer data and considered the J2EE application server model. However, having worked with Micro Focus Net Express and Server for COBOL, we were impressed with our experience with Micro Focus and saw Visual COBOL as the answer to our business integration issues.

"Essentially it was all about re-tuning what we already had, using our in-house COBOL developers to create what we needed. We'd prepared a 'wish list' list for the initial phase of our project that included the modernization of our applications and re-using current business rules, while adding an improved visual interface and an easy re-platform of our existing application to the Windows platform."

Better business benefits

The decision-making process when looking at suppliers and product solutions was heavily influenced by price. Romão Calçados compared rewriting the COBOL application and using different technologies.

In doing this, it would have had to locate and hire the expertise needed to pursue the rewrite strategy, which came at an increased cost to the project. Romão Calçados was much more comfortable with the modernization option, using Visual COBOL, as Cancellieri explains:

"We quickly established that re-purposing what we had in respect of our core IP and application assets was 60% more cost-effective than rewriting or replacing existing programs. A low risk, high return exercise in modernizing our existing systems to meet new needs, without risking what we had worked so hard to achieve, felt like the right move."

"In addition, having committed to paying a third party to extract information for use within COBOL we were reluctant to commit to the additional expense of ERP software. We had spotted a chance to improve our time to market and recognised the potential to improve the return on investment."

"So we used our Visual COBOL investment to build new real-time links between key application functions, such as payments and stock control. The Visual COBOL for Visual Studio product provided us with many different integration options to suit our infrastructure needs. Because of this flexibility and choice, we were able to realize an eight month ROI on this project – which allowed us to go to market much faster than planned."

The old systems had suffered from a significant disconnect between the payment process, stock availability, and a visibility of the supply line.

The modernization project has delivered a better customer experience. The access to real time data – in the shape of the stock inventory, for example – closed this supply line gap. When applications perform better, so does the company.

Key to this successful integration is Visual COBOL, which is working through the customer data generated by the e-commerce marketplace and user interface. The key mechanics of the e-commerce program remain the same, which has helped to maintain consistency and accelerate project delivery. The development environment chosen was Microsoft Visual Studio, which was required to support the new Windows-style user interface. The deployment architecture is Windows and ASP.NET, underpinned by its business transactions, written in native COBOL code.

Seamless integration

Cancellieri concludes: "We like self-sufficiency and to this point we've done most of the work ourselves. Micro Focus provided training for the new solution, which included the integration between the e-commerce program and existing COBOL programs. It's going well and we've now successfully gone live. Going forward we've identified opportunities to leverage additional technologies with Visual COBOL, namely Web Services and XML documents. This opens the door for future integration needs.

"Having grown from a modest store in Sao Paulo to a global enterprise with complex back-office operations, our partnership with Micro Focus is helping us work through our inevitable growing pains. Our in-house IT team are happy with this modern, progressive system. It is a platform for achieving ambitious goals. We are now able to create modern applications that integrate with our E-commerce program reducing risk, cost and time-to-market.

"Our principles are consistent. We like working with people who understand the nature of our business and will implement the solutions that work for us. It was therefore natural for us to continue the successful relationship we already had with Micro Focus. Micro Focus leaves big shoes to fill – which is where we come in!"

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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