

WOLTERS KLUWER ITALY: VISUAL COBOL ENABLES NEW MARKET EXPANSION THROUGH CLOUD COMPUTING



At a glance: Wolters Kluwer Italy

Maintaining market leadership and expanding customer reach with Visual COBOL.

Solution:

- Visual COBOL for Visual Studio
- COBOL Server

Challenge

Wolters Kluwer Italy is part of the Wolters Kluwer group. It operates throughout The Netherlands in the professional information services, software and training services markets. Wolters Kluwer reported annual revenues of €3.6 billion in 2012.

B.Point, its flagship software solution for professional legal and tax firms, is a market-leading application and contributes substantially to annual revenues. It was written in COBOL more than 20 years ago. "This is a fundamental product used by thousands of industry professionals," explains Sergio Boaretto, Software Engineering Manager. "It has maintained its functionality and has been continually enhanced, driven by market needs and constantly-changing industry legislation."

Wolters Kluwer Italy's core business is tax, accounting and payroll administration. Few commercial products are available to meet this very complex need. To protect its market-leading position – and achieve a more cost-effective, flexible and manageable software solution for their customers – Wolters Kluwer Italy needed to deliver a Cloud based Software as a Service solution for its B.Point customers.

Changing market conditions

The market is changing rapidly, according to Boaretto: "Tax firm customers are becoming more and more demanding, requesting new capabilities. Benchmarking, Business Intelligence and monitoring business performance are just a few examples of these value-added services." A further example is the introduction of new devices into the industry has significantly increased collaboration within the working environment.



Wolters Kluwer Italia

URL: www.wki.it

Industry: Publishing and professional software

Country: Italy

Highlights

- Enabled customer reach to new markets using cloud deployment
- Cost-effective reuse of existing business logic and data
- Industry standard & modern IDE improves developer productivity
- Delivered new flexible and multi-platform solution offering

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This trend creates the desire to access information located on a company network or in the cloud securely and easily, regardless of device or location. Wolters Kluwer Italy sees Visual COBOL as the solution to enable its cloud computing strategy. By leveraging its existing application platform, written in COBOL, Wolters Kluwer saw the opportunity to deliver new value to their existing customers and expand into new markets. Reusing this proven application with Visual COBOL brought this goal closer.

Looking for the right technology partner

Wolters Kluwer realised that rewriting its application would be cost-prohibitive and wouldn't support the fast go-to-market route needed. It wanted a solution to bridge the existing COBOL application with new technologies. As Wolters Kluwer already used Micro Focus Net Express and Server Express, the step towards Visual COBOL was a logical one.

A two-week proof-of-concept demonstrated how Micro Focus could transform B.Point through reusing existing business logic routines. Boaretto was impressed: "Visual COBOL enables us to reuse and extend our existing COBOL applications to new and modern platforms. It delivered portability and flexibility for our application deployment needs. It was the right choice for our business. The move to Visual COBOL has opened up new opportunities by making our services available through new channels."

Continual release cycle

B.Point is frequently updated to meet regulatory changes. Updates must be released quickly. Previously, users were forced to interrupt in-process activity to install the updates, negatively impacting productivity. "Thanks to Micro Focus Visual COBOL, enabling B.Point cloud delivery, we can make updates available transparently to the user without impacting user productivity. It saves us time and money in reaching all solution users effectively," says Boaretto.

Support of mobile devices

Another crucial point was to maintain the end-user experience during the transition to Visual COBOL. Customers were familiar with – and liked – the COBOL application's interface. Boaretto explains: "Adding graphics to the interface increased the complexity. The distribution of devices with a small surface area has forced application developers to rethink the application interfaces as we plan for mobile application access." Wolters Kluwer used a third party software solution, Phone Gap, to create application interfaces in HTML 5 to support its web and mobile strategy.

Visual COBOL enabled Wolters Kluwer to interact with other software technologies, such as database platforms and new modern programming languages such as C#. "Updating the database automatically and quickly by drawing information directly from our land register database is quite an advantage. Visual COBOL has brought the two environments together and reduced the time we would have had to spend developing an ad hoc system."

The Visual COBOL investment will enable Wolters Kluwer to extend the life of a reliable asset into the future. Boaretto comments: "Over these years we have accompanied our customers along this technology evolution. Today they can access B.Point either through a traditional client screen interface, or a modern web-based interface delivered through the cloud. Visual COBOL has provided a pathway to the future for our application."

Increased developer productivity

Wolter Kluwer's developers are also reaping the benefits of the new Visual COBOL development environment, says Boaretto: "Most of our developers have modern development language experience. The industry-standard integration within Visual COBOL has enabled our Visual Studio developers to quickly get up to speed. This efficiency allows us to now invest in new product capabilities that will make B.Point even more effective in its market. Visual COBOL has enabled us to achieve higher levels of developer productivity and product quality".

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