HOW GMAC INSURANCE MAKES PROGRESS

WEB-ENABLE ADABAS ACCESS FOR E-COMMERCE

In the auto industry, e-commerce is vital, not only for selling automobiles, but also for financing and insuring them. General Motors Corporation is among the industry giants pushing for enterprise-wide Web-enablement of existing IT assets to meet growing consumer demand for easy-to-use, self-service platforms. For National General Insurance Company (now known as the GMAC Insurance Group, a subsidiary of General Motors Acceptance Corporation), building a customer service Web site meant Web-enabling access to many years of ADABAS legacy mainframe data. GMAC Insurance selected the Progress® Shadow® software solutions for data access, for legacy application renewal, and for its e-commerce project, and was more than happy with the results.

GMAC Insurance

CHALLENGE

Web-enable access to years of ADABAS legacy mainframe data for an easy-to-use, self-service Web site

SOLUTION

Shadow z/Direct met requirements for leveraging legacy ADABAS and DB2 data and logic for new Java Web applications, with minimal coding and footprint

BENEFIT

Implemented quickly so GMAC realized the increased sales and reduced costs associated with e-service and e-commerce

NO OTHER PRODUCT

As part of its commitment to Web services for its more than 400,000 policyholders, GMAC Insurance began the process of building the first phase of its Web site. According to Project Manager Scott Nelson, phase one was designed to allow customers to navigate their policy and billing information and pay their premiums online, at their convenience. Phase two was designed to allow potential customers to compare various coverage options and calculate rate quotes online, without having to consult with a customer sales representative. "The benefits of allowing customers to perform common tasks, with less dependency on customer support representatives, are tremendous on both sides of the counter," said Nelson, who anticipates increased sales and reduced costs.

Nelson explained the process that led to his company's selection of Progress® Shadow® z/Direct. "We came to the table with an interesting set of challenges," he recalled. "We had been using ADABAS for many years and wanted to access our legacy data and leverage it for new Web applications, which we were writing in Java. We also wanted to access DB2 data and to hit COBOL subroutines for remote procedure calls to DB2 and ADABAS data. That was one tall order, and I believe no other product on the market could have done the needed task as easily and effectively as Shadow z/Direct," said Nelson.

GMAC Insurance's Lead Programmer/Analyst Jeff Sadler agreed. "ADABAS isn't a true relational database, so interactivity with other databases is very tricky," he said. "But Shadow z/Direct does a lot with minimal coding, so we get full functionality with ADABAS."

Nelson said his company looked at several e-business integration solutions. However, most of the software products required a CICS transaction-processing extension, which his branch of GMAC does not use. "We tried one product that installed horribly and left a huge footprint in terms of memory and space," Nelson recalled.

He said his team also looked at another product, but was not impressed with it or the sales and support team. "The negative side of one

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Project Manager
GMAC Insurance Group

of the competitive products we reviewed was that it required a gateway, and it had read-only capability for ADABAS data," he explained. "And on the updating side, it required several pages of complicated coding, as opposed to 20 lines or less for the Shadow z/Direct product. In terms of ease-of-use and coding, Shadow z/Direct is as easy as you can get!"

ANATOMY OF A SOLUTION

Shadow z/Direct is the Progress solution for data access and legacy application renewal. It allows IBM System/390 users to readily incorporate data and transactions from DB2, IMS/DB, IMS/TM, CICS/TS, ADABAS, Sybase MDI RSPs, VSAM and other mainframe sources into a variety of execution environments, including ODBC and JDBC. By providing direct client-to-host access, Shadow z/Direct eliminates the need for database gateways and associated issues regarding performance, scalability, security, control, and management.

Shadow z/Direct provides an exceptionally robust and stable e-business integration infrastructure that enables IT organizations to blend existing enterprise resources, distributed systems, and emerging technologies with low complexity, cost, and cycle time. Numerous Shadow features and optimizations combine to deliver high performance, security, and scalability, with extensive diagnostics, monitoring, and control capabilities.

The Shadow JDBC driver combines the best of Shadow z/Direct and Java "write-once-run-anywhere" technology by allowing developers to produce Web applications that transparently incorporate System/390 data and transactions using the Java JDBC data access interface. The Shadow JDBC driver supports leading Web application servers, including BEA WebLogic Enterprise, which was chosen for the GMAC project.

For GMAC Insurance, the Shadow solution allows a GMAC customer to access information using any Web browser. The request flows through GMAC's Web server, and then through its Web application server, which contains the Shadow Client driver. The Shadow Client driver accesses the System/390 mainframe, where Shadow z/Direct provides access to DB2 and

ADABAS data. Existing logic developed in COBOL subroutines participates in the process.

SPEED AND SUPPORT

As for the product itself, Nelson remarked that Shadow z/Direct works "so fast that, at first, I thought something was wrong!" Nelson has been particularly pleased with the speed with which Shadow z/Direct enables his IT people to call COBOL subroutines. "With Shadow z/Direct, we don't have to recode rules and calls in Java or some other language. Instead, the very same rules and calls we use in our mainframe can now be used online and in batch environments. The results are incredibly fast."

According to Nelson, access to the mainframe has a 98-99% sub-second response time, with access in the Java environment at approximately one second. "That's FAST," he emphasized.

Even the demo impressed Sadler. "There is an area where you're instructed how to use the Shadow pseudo-stored procedure for SQL calls," he said. "You can access data and have it returned as an ODBC table. Once I got the data source set up, it rolled. I got something back from my very first entry. It worked very fast, and I didn't have to go through tons of coding. I was able to try many 'what-if' scenarios."

Sadler was also impressed with the proof-of-concept phase of the project. During this stage, Progress Software worked closely with both GMAC and BEA. The team found quick, easy solutions to what Sadler referred to as some "very tricky" problems, and the proof-of-concept was completed within four days. Both Nelson and Sadler praised the knowledge and responsiveness of the Progress support team, noting that many issues throughout the project were resolved within minutes, and most were resolved within one or two days. During the few instances when a problem required more than one day to solve, Progress sent daily status reports.

"Progress showed an amazing level of customer support and service from the very beginning, with their ability to support enhancements," Nelson explained.

PROGRESS SOFTWARE

Progress Software Corporation (NASDAQ: PRGS) is a global software company that enables enterprises to be operationally responsive to changing conditions and customer interactions as they occur. Our goal is to enable our customers to capitalize on new opportunities, drive greater efficiencies, and reduce risk. Progress offers a comprehensive portfolio of best-in-class infrastructure software spanning event-driven visibility and real-time response, open integration, data access and integration, and application development and management—all supporting on-premises and SaaS/cloud deployments. Progress maximizes the benefits of operational responsiveness while minimizing IT complexity and total cost of ownership.

WORLDWIDE HEADQUARTERS

Progress Software Corporation, 14 Oak Park, Bedford, MA 01730 USA
Tel: +1 781 280-4000 Fax: +1 781 280-4095 On the Web at: www.progress.com

Find us on facebook.com/progresssw twitter.com/progresssw youtube.com/progresssw

For regional international office locations and contact information, please refer to the Web page below:
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