

## Specialized Business Applications Run Houghton's Distributed Business and Maintain Competitive Advantage



### CASE STUDY

#### CHALLENGE

Houghton needed to create specialized applications to meet the unique needs of its distributed business and support stringent government regulations.

#### SOLUTION

Progress OpenEdge® and solutions from Progress Application Partners are used to centralize application development and maintenance and run Houghton's production and operations across Europe.

#### WHY PROGRESS® SOFTWARE

OpenEdge provides a reliable and flexible infrastructure that enables Houghton to keep pace with evolving technology trends and support complex business needs.

#### BENEFIT

Houghton is achieving a competitive advantage with its ability to develop and deploy applications that improve operations throughout Europe and enable consistent processes across the organization.

#### EVOLVING CUSTOMIZED APPLICATIONS TO MANAGE UNIQUE MANUFACTURING REQUIREMENTS

One of the world's foremost suppliers of specialized industrial lubricants, Houghton builds close relationships with customers by offering high-quality products and superior service.

Houghton PLC in the United Kingdom has developed specialized applications using the Progress OpenEdge integrated business application platform to help manage and run the business.

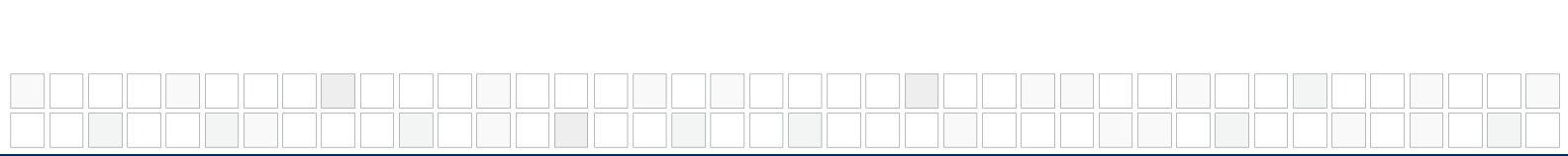
The business logic captured in these applications gives Houghton a competitive advantage in the UK marketplace. And the company is now extending these character-based applications to support operations throughout Europe and adding graphical interfaces to increase productivity and streamline and centralize application development.

According to Matt Thorpe, information system manager for Houghton PLC, "We are an evolving Progress® site, and our success with Progress technology has given us the confidence to develop a European system based on our character-based system originally developed for the UK. Progress provides the reliable infrastructure and flexible tool sets that allow us to keep pace with evolving technology and computing trends."

#### SELECTING LONG-TERM TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS

Houghton PLC initially selected Progress technology because the company needed to build highly tailored applications. Management evaluated available development and deployment platforms, and selected the OpenEdge integrated business application platform.

Thorpe explained, "We evaluated alternative technology solutions from Oracle, IBM, and others but determined that Progress offered the most intuitive development environment and the reliability we needed to build the applications that would run our production and operations."



As a manufacturer of fluids, Houghton has specialized information systems requirements. Thorpe stated, “Standard manufacturing software applications at the time did not fit our needs since our products are based on carefully blending percentages of fluids to create unique products. We also face ongoing chemical regulatory requirements and we needed to be able to respond easily to evolving European chemical and environmental legislation.”

Houghton also selected MFG/PRO financial applications from Progress Application Partner QAD, and developed a suite of character-based business applications tailored to the company's unique requirements. The IT staff developed manufacturing, customer care, purchasing, and business support applications, and integrated its suite of internally developed applications with the financial modules of MFG/PRO.

Houghton has continuously updated the applications to support new feature requirements and changing business needs while enabling compliance with evolving chemical legislation in the UK. “The Progress OpenEdge platform provides us with rock-solid reliability,” said Thorpe. “We don't have to worry about downtime, and we run the database and the applications without the need for a dedicated database administrator.”

### **INCREASING EFFICIENCY BY CENTRALIZING APPLICATION DEVELOPMENT**

Houghton management decided to re-develop the character-based systems supporting UK operations to support broader Houghton operations throughout Europe. This required the ability to add a Windows Graphical User Interface (GUI) for the applications and upgrade the software for multi-country support.

“Our colleagues throughout Europe have long-admired our software systems, since we have built applications that cover just about every area of the business and correspond to the existing workflow,” said Thorpe. “By developing a migration strategy toward a common application environment, we could centralize application development and maintenance while allowing operations in other countries to benefit from the business logic of our existing applications.”

He added, “Most of our operations throughout Europe have already become accustomed to graphical interfaces, since many of them have upgraded their own software packages. While these applications did not offer the customized features and workflow capabilities of the applications developed in the UK, they did have visual interfaces. We realized that we couldn't offer the UK applications with their current character-based interfaces, so we sought to migrate the underlying business logic while offering easier-to-use front-end interfaces.”

Houghton also concluded that the programming task for graphical interfaces would be less exhaustive than the initial character development because the database design and business logic elements already existed, and that the use of sophisticated development tools would make it easier to offer the applications in multiple languages throughout European countries.

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— Matt Thorpe  
Information System  
Manager



## LEVERAGING INVESTMENTS IN BUSINESS LOGIC

Houghton's IT department wanted to focus 14 years of investments in application development and port the business logic from the character-based applications to deliver centralized applications to users throughout Europe—all based on the Progress OpenEdge platform.

OpenEdge includes the infrastructure and tools that software providers need to support business applications throughout their life cycle. It includes a unified environment with development tools that simplify complex tasks and industrial-strength application servers to drive the business-processing logic.

It also includes a repository-based framework that allows developers to dynamically generate multiple interfaces for a single set of business logic. The logic is stored in the repository and the interfaces can be dynamically tailored in response to customer profiles, allowing Houghton to tailor the interface to support multiple languages.

“Progress technology allows us to improve developer productivity by eliminating coding tasks associated with creating robust business components, managing data access, and building system-wide features such as security and printing services,” said Thorpe.

“Progress Professional Services provides the architectural consulting and the technology training we needed to begin the development effort quickly. And we've been able to augment our internal development organization by obtaining assistance from Progress developers to help us during the most demanding aspects of the project.”

Houghton uses the Progress® OpenEdge® Studio, which offers a unified, highly productive environment that simplifies the development and migration of applications. OpenEdge Studio presents one workbench, one set of tools for developing a broad range of business applications. OpenEdge Studio is the development environment for the Progress application framework, and it automates much of the effort needed to create user interfaces using visual tools.

Houghton also relies on the Roundtable Total Software Management System TSMS™ for OpenEdge, which is a total team productivity tool that streamlines the development environment and offers complete software lifecycle management of development tasks, object versions, promotions, customizations, dependencies, deployments, and much more.

“We'll roll the applications out gradually, and they will eventually run in over a dozen locations,” stated Thorpe. “They will be localized to each country and enable integration with desktop productivity applications.”

## REDUCING HARDWARE AND COMMUNICATIONS COSTS

All applications will be maintained centrally, and the Progress® OpenEdge® Application Server will allow access via thin clients with graphical user interfaces. "The thin client approach will allow us to keep the lid on hardware and communications costs," said Thorpe. "Intelligent clients on user PCs throughout Europe will be able to securely tunnel into the applications through a Virtual Private Network (VPN), and we can consolidate the applications in one server farm, and minimize the information sent over the network."

By leveraging years of application development investments in business logic and adding flexible and powerful interface options and development capabilities, Houghton is able to develop and deploy applications to help improve operations throughout Europe and enable consistent workflows and processes across the organization.

### 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](http://www.progress.com)

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

<http://www.progress.com/worldwide>

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## ABOUT PROGRESS SOFTWARE

Progress Software Corporation (Nasdaq: PRGS) provides application infrastructure software for the development, deployment, integration and management of business applications. Our goal is to maximize the benefits of information technology while minimizing its complexity and total cost of ownership.

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