

Western Tube rolls out speedy Web build with mrc-Productivity



The Company:

Western Tube & Conduit is the largest manufacturer of conduit, mechanical tube, and fence posts on the West Coast. Founded over 37 years ago, the company began in Vernon, California with a single tube mill that produced conduit. The thriving company grew exponentially from that humble beginning, and today boasts five high-speed tube mills, a steel-slitting line, and facilities for finishing located on 21-acres in Long Beach, California. Western Tube's considerable success has always been based on keeping a few steps ahead of its competition, and with a web-based world, the company knew well the challenges it faced in today's marketplace.

The Challenge:

One of the company's challenges was within its IT

department: the decision to update its traditional order-entry procedures. The system that they were working with was manual, involving the sales force filing paper orders, the customer service representatives entering those orders into an excel spreadsheet, and then exporting those spreadsheets to their iSeries database. This system not only created extra work for its sales and customer service staff, but the process produced orders that were not in real time and made cataloging an accurate inventory impossible. Western Tube was looking for a better way.

The Objective:

The company decided to develop a browser-based order entry system that would give their sales representatives direct access to order-entry,

and would allow their customer service representatives to work off a user-friendly graphical interface.

Traditionally "user-friendly graphical interface" has just not been part of the green-screen and AS/400 vernacular.

Furthermore, questions remained unanswered: How would they make this order-entry system web-based and maintain the integrity of the data security without having to invest in all new hardware? How complicated would it be on the backend to transfer data back and forth from their database to a web server?

The development of any order-entry system is complex, often requiring the painstaking integration of numerous backend applications. This can mean a vast re-working and modification of back-end programs and databases already in place, in concert with building a workable front-end system from the ground up.

Western Tube also did not want to become too beholden to outside vendors. "When we decided to web-enable it, we thought Java was the way to go, and we hired two Java

programmers to build it for us,” explained Bernie Visser, Western Tube MIS director. “They worked on the system for 9 months, and at that time when it still wasn’t to our liking we went in search of another solution.”

Western Tube’s development team was not trained in Java, and the learning curve was too great to conquer in as a short a time as they required. “At that point we were way behind and we needed to get something going quickly.” That would also have meant hiring another team of consultants, and becoming dependent on them to keep the application up and running in the future.

So, what to do?

The Solution:

After investigating various options, Western Tube chose the mrc-Productivity Series and mrc’s Solution Services. “We built the application in CGI/RPG since we were familiar with RPG, but, now we can easily deploy the apps as java servlets or within WebSphere because it was built with this tool, if that’s what we want to do.”

They were able to serve up the web-application directly from their iSeries, which meant no additional hardware or security considerations to worry about. Moreover, with the mrc-Productivity Series, the manufacturing company not only got the quick build they needed, but the long-term independence they wanted.



“We talked to one of the consultants at mrc and he said we would be able to get the whole thing done in about two months. And he was right.” Western Tube was able to create a web-enabled order-entry system in 9 weeks using the mrc-Productivity Series. This was accomplished on budget and in record time using the mrc product. In fact, as a bonus, using mrc’s tool suite Western Tube and Conduit was able to build a front-end interface and integrate its backend programs with little, if any, modification to the backend itself.

“Brian, our consultant, was a full-on expert, and we worked together very well, very professional. Everything turned out the way he said it would, which was great. We were lucky,” said Visser.

Additionally, Western Tube was able to create another feature of the order entry system by designing an

application that gives the user the ability to create quotes on the spot. The growing company also has plans to add a B2B application to their order entry in future months.

For more information on Western Tube and Conduit, visit: www.westerntube.com.

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