

CASE STUDY



Retail Assist—System i to .NET Framework

Retail Assist takes Merret to the Web for increased sales.

Customer

Merret, a retail supply-chain solution from Retail Assist, provides maximum flexibility and opportunity to today's fast-moving retail marketplace. It is a real-time, multi-currency, multi-channel application that encompasses most areas of the retail supply process. This includes product content, purchasing, warehousing, replenishment, inward and outward distribution, store back office, retail financials, in-season planning, CRM data capture and reporting.

As a core centralized retail component that offers standard interfaces and connectors, Merret works seamlessly with other industry standard solutions and bespoke applications. It provides various channeling options including Web, mail order, internal and external concessions, and store sale and ordering.

Merret has achieved exceptional success since its launch in 2001. No stranger to industry accolades, its most recent award received was the 2007 European Retail Solutions Award for "Best use of e-commerce in a retail environment" in partnership with Warehouse and Principles.

Challenge

Until recently, Merret was only available on System i, a platform chosen in the past by many retailers for its robustness and scalability. However, following discussions with existing and prospective clients, it became apparent that many customers were interested in deploying Merret as a Web-based solution on Microsoft .NET, today's fastest growing solution platform. Retail Assist quickly realized that a .NET solution would enable the company to grow the Merret user base.

"By extending Merret's proven capabilities into the highly flexible and cost-effective Microsoft .NET arena, we can give retailers more choice in how they deploy and benefit from the solution, whatever retail model they employ and whatever stage of maturity their business is at."

Nigel Illingworth, Product Director at Retail Assist

But none of these solutions fully met AiM's needs, as they required the continued presence of the System i on the backend, the complete retraining or replacement of AiM's software development staff, loss of control over its solution as development was passed to offshore resources, or exorbitant investments that mitigated the financial benefits of moving to the fast-growing portion of the market.



CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

- Time to market
- Reliability of process and end product
- Supportability of the application

ASNA Solution

In architecting the platform transformation, Retail Assist needed to understand how the application should be structured in the .NET environment; what the look and feel of the new interface should be; what the requirements would be for the hardware and network; and how to implement standard .NET components during the application conversion process.

Retail Assist leveraged ASNA's industry leading modernization solution to migrate Merret to the .NET platform. They used ASNA Monarch to transform the System i applications to native .NET applications. Using Monarch, they converted the interactive elements of Merret to .NET Web pages. The resulting screens were updated to give the application a similar look and feel.

ASNA Visual RPG (AVR) was used for development, maintenance and support of Merret in the .NET environment, and allowed Retail Assist to continue using the familiar and powerful RPG syntax. And ASNA DataGate was used to enable the .NET application to natively communicate with the data residing on the System i platform. The majority of the application was transformed to a demonstrable Web interface in only nine months.

The converted Web application runs on a Windows server as a standard pre-compiled Web site. The application communicates with a backend System i to run background programs and perform database activities using DataGate.

Retail Assist

Retail Assist is a leading retail-only solutions and services company, providing UK and international retailers with end-to-end business applications plus a comprehensive range of services that reduce costs, optimise retail operations and support higher

“Retailers know better than most that customers like to have a choice. We’re simply following the same approach, giving retailers another way to deploy Merret, to improve efficiency and achieve cost savings. Retail Assist is uniquely positioned to harness the strengths of both the IBM and Microsoft platforms.”

Alan Morris, Managing Director at Retail Assist

revenues.

They provide their clients with true breadth and depth in both retail and technology know-how, adding measurable value to their operations and driving increased profitability through the delivery of proven retail-specific solutions and services.