

ASNA Case Study

CBS Outdoor uses ASNA Visual RPG coast-to-coast in Canada

If you're driving around Canada and see an advertisement on a poster, a billboard, a building wall, a commercial truck, a transit shelter, or even a subway train, there's a pretty good chance that Viacom Outdoor was responsible for that advertising. With more than 90 years experience, CBS Outdoor is Canada's leading outdoor advertising company. It offers more than 110,000 outdoor advertising displays from coast to coast in Canada.

The challenge of course, is how to manage these 110,000 displays? How do salespeople determine availability and pricing? It's a tough job! CBS Outdoor has 16 regional sales centers with many employees in each center, each of whom needs update-to-date information as to display availability and pricing. Until recently, this process was managed (to use the word loosely!) with an old FoxPro application. This out-of-house application was supported by a part-time independent contractor; it was frail and caused nearly as many problems as it solved. The process had evolved into a wasp's nest of convoluted manual processes. Milvi Salurand, CBS Outdoor's Director of Information Technology, and her programming team, set out to solve the problem once and for all. She chose ASNA Visual RPG (AVR) to create a Windows-based application that communicates directly with CBS Outdoor's centrally-located IBM i/400.

Why AVR?

Given their previous experience, Milvi and her team quickly ruled out using FoxPro again. They also made an initial foray into building the new app with Visual Basic and ODBC. That project quickly fell apart; the ODBC connection was too slow and Milvi's programming team didn't have enough VB experience.

Explains Milvi, "We had been customers of other ASNA products back from the days when ASNA sold green-screen utilities. We were vaguely familiar with AVR and acquired an evaluation copy."

In short order Milvi's programming team was able to build a working prototype. The two initial programmers on the project

AT A GLANCE

Customer Profile

With more than 90 years experience, CBS Outdoor is Canada's leading outdoor advertising company. It offers more than 110,000 outdoor advertising displays from coast to coast in Canada.

Situation

CBS Outdoor needed to replace an out-of-house application and convoluted manual processes with a modern, reliable, customized application that could be developed and managed in-house.

Solution

CBS Outdoor selected ASNA Visual RPG to create a Windows based application that communicates directly with their centrally-located IBM i.

Benefits

Completion of the new sales and display advertising management system only took six months.

The new application was so successful in integrating inputs and outputs that the back office sales support staff was able to be reduced by 25%.

Products

AVR.NET, DataGate, IBM i, OS/400, DB2/400



were both nearly 100% green-screen RPG programmers, with one of them having very minimal VB exposure.

Milvi continues, "We were all pleasantly surprised how quickly the prototype went together and how easy AVR was to learn. And, the price for AVR was reasonable and justifiable for our initial project."

Another factor in AVR's favor for Milvi was the training and technical support ASNA provides for AVR. Her team used both as they developed the application. As you might imagine, this programming project was non-trivial, to say the least. Relying on a vendor she could trust was an important issue for Milvi--every aspect of the project had to contribute to its success.

From prototype to deployment

The goal of the project was to accelerate the internal collection process for advertising display information. The CBS Outdoor sales teams needed to be able to intelligently and quickly know the status of any of those 110,000 advertising displays. The old process wasn't integrated well. The sales team would provide input data and a back office support team worked long and hard to manipulate that information into the various sales forecasts, budgets, contracts, and work orders needed.

Says Milvi, "Our new system needed to be well integrated. We wanted it to have the smarts and capabilities to translate our sales teams' inputs into the hard data we need to manage our advertising displays. We needed both interactive displays of this data as well as numerous hardcopy reports." Two other critical aspects of the new system were its user interface and its ability to integrate tightly with Excel.

"The look and feel of our new application was extremely important."

Milvi Salurand, CBS Outdoor's Director of Information Technology

Milvi continues, "The look and feel of our new application was extremely important. The core users are the sales force and they, because they use Microsoft's Word, Excel and Outlook heavily, have solid experience with Windows-based applications. We needed quick user acceptance and minimal learning time."

AVR produces native Windows executables (with support for third-party user interface controls if you need them) and produced exactly the user interface Milvi and her team needed. AVR's intrinsic ability to produce printed output (without deploying add-ons such as Crystal Reports or other third-party products) was also a plus for Milvi. And, because AVR is compliant with other standard Windows applications, it integrates tightly with Excel.

Up and running

With one of the developers having taken one of ASNA's week long AVR Windows classes, the proof-of-concept work behind them, and a solid design in hand, Milvi's team got started.

Once the actual coding started, Milvi was stunned at the productivity levels AVR afforded her developers. "The speed with which our developers became productive using AVR was remarkable," she says. Also contributing to her team's productivity was AVR's ability to work very naturally with many of CBS Outdoor's existing back-end IBM i/400 components. Many batch processes, such as sales analyses reports and contract billing, remain unchanged and continue to run as traditional green-screen apps. Because AVR integrates well with legacy apps, Milvi's team didn't



have to rewrite everything. They were able to spend the bulk of their effort on the user interface and the application's front end.

Many of the application's new users would connect remotely to use it across CBS Outdoor's WAN. Some of those users would connect with high-speed, reliable connections; others, not so lucky, would connect with a lowly 56K dial-up line. Milvi's team optimized their application to work well for the slowest dial-up connection that may be encountered.

Out to the masses

From early prototypes to deployed finished product took Milvi's team about six months. As the application progressed, Milvi's team acquired two other members: one for writing help text and another for coordinating testing and training.

To ensure a successful deployment, Milvi went the extra step and created a superb Web-based training program. Again, she intended to do everything possible to stack the deck of success in her favor. Her efforts to provide on-line training were quite successful (that on-line training is proprietary and I had to commit to a non-disclosure agreement to see it, but take my word for it, it is great).

In the end, Milvi's team delivered a comprehensive sales and display advertising management system. It added substantial functionality over the original system and was so successful in integrating inputs and outputs that the back office sales support staff was able to be reduced by 25%. Further, the new application accelerates the advertising sales cycle by providing CBS Outdoor's 16 branches with timely, current information at all times.

"I was very familiar with the basic AVR model and our sales people continue to provide feedback about their use of the system to ensure its ongoing evolution. I think we scored big with AVR!"

Milvi Salurand, CBS Outdoor's Director of Information Technology

Sweet success

Working with AVR to create the Windows-based solution was a solid success for Milvi and her team. Next up, they are evaluating using AVR to create a Web-based customer inquiry system. This system will enable customers to view images of CBS Outdoor billboards stored in the inventory database on the CBS Outdoor IBM i/400.

Concludes Milvi, "With our new system, our sales team can speak confidently about the information in the system and respond in a very timely fashion to customers about all of CBS Outdoor's available advertising opportunities. Not only are they better armed for success, they are comfortable with the look and feel of the new application and find it simple to use. Our sales people continue to provide feedback about their use of the system to ensure its ongoing evolution. I think we scored big with AVR!"

About ASNA

ASNA, provides comprehensive and flexible solutions for modernizing IBM i applications to the Microsoft .NET platform. ASNA enables companies to integrate and extend their solutions to .NET, the Web and beyond, while preserving investments in IT and human resources. ASNA solutions are distributed worldwide and used by more than



Leaders in IBM i Modernization

We can get you there

a million end users.

ASNA is a Gold Level partner of Microsoft's Partner Network, Microsoft Visual Studio Industry Partner, and an Advanced Tier Member of IBM's PartnerWorld for Developers. ASNA is also a gold level partner of Microsoft's Platform Modernization Alliance.

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