

ASNA Case Study

ASNA Visual RPG enables Genie to give customer service a lift

We all know that the Internet has dramatically changed the world of business and commerce quite a lot in the last 10 years. Or has it? In the old days, street-corner vendors and mom and pop shops distinguished themselves by offering solid service at competitive prices--all served up with a smile.

Yes, the Internet has changed the mechanics of commerce, but it hasn't changed the semantics. Selling groceries to a neighbor around the corner or selling commercial lift devices to someone who lives halfway around the world both hinge on the vendor's ability to keep promises. For nearly 40 years, Genie Industries has been selling commercial lift equipment. Genie's ability to keep customer promises has figured largely in its success over the years.

For its global network of dealers and customer service agents, Genie Industries used ASNA's Visual RPG for .NET (AVR for .NET) to create an Internet-based customer service tracking application. This application is used worldwide to help Genie manage and fulfill its customer service issues. It is just another way Genie ensures it keeps customer promises.

Sizing Up the problem

Back in the old green-screen days, Genie Industries used typical back-office, green-screen methods to track its customer commitments. Postal mail, fax machines, telephone calls, and driving to the four corners of the earth were all used to ensure promises were being kept. As Genie grew, so grew the volume of customer service transactions that needed to be managed. The IT team at Genie knew there had to be a better way.

Says Paul Adrien, Genie's software engineer, "We took a pretty hard look at our customer service tracking process in 1997. At

AT A GLANCE

Customer Profile

For more than 40 years, Genie's innovative designs and reliable products have made Genie a world leader in the production of material lifts, portable aerial work platforms, scissor lifts, and self-propelled telescopic and articulated booms.

Situation

Genie needed to create an Internet-based customer service tracking application used worldwide to manage and fulfill customer service issues.

Solution

Using AVR for .NET, in less than two months, Genie deployed their new call tracking application on the Internet.

Benefits

The new application totally replaced the old back-office bound application. Genie customer issues are now tracked in real time, worldwide.

Products

AVR.NET

IBM i

OS/400

DB2



that time, ASNA's Visual RPG Classic [the component object model version of AVR] came to our attention and very quickly seemed like just the tool for us to build a new-generation customer service application. We liked the fact that AVR used the RPG language and preserved everything we knew about file I/O on the AS/400."

After taking one of ASNA's five-day training classes (back in '97), Adrien and a couple of other members of the Genie IT team built a new customer service application. Adrien continues, "That original AVR rewrite was very effective, but it was written to run on local PCs as a native Windows application. It worked well for us for several years, but it was bound to the back office, making it hard for us to use throughout our global network of dealers and representatives. The advent of the Internet as a medium over which to deploy an 'internal' application was very appealing to us. With the maturation of the Internet, it became apparent we needed an Internet-based customer service tracking application."

To the Internet

Adrien and the Genie IT team set out to investigate how to create an Internet-based customer service application. The version of AVR Genie was using did support Internet application development, but the Web application model it used had a pretty steep learning curve.

AVR Classic used Microsoft's COM-based Application Server Pages (ASP). That Web development model, while very effective, is rather complex and doesn't lend itself well to separating business logic from the Web user interface. In 2003, ASNA introduced Visual RPG for .NET. That product changed the Internet equation for Genie.

Adrien explains, "By 2003 or so, we had acquired a very competent Web developer who was familiar with the ASP model. He dabbled with the AVR and ASP pages, but progress was slow and hard in coming. About that time, ASNA introduced Visual RPG for .NET. When we learned that AVR for .NET intrinsically supports Microsoft's ASP.NET Web development model, we were very excited. We knew the ASP.NET model made Web application development much easier and required lots less code than the old Web development model. We also knew that it worked with our business data on our AS/400s and our existing Windows 2000 Web servers."

"I'm especially happy with the RPG syntax AVR for .NET uses. While it retains the core capabilities of RPG, ASNA has made RPG a first-class, expressive language. I'm a long-time RPG green-screen coder, and I learned ASNA's RPG syntax very quickly--as did our Visual Basic team members,"

Paul Adrien, Genie's software engineer

It was time for the Genie IT team to go back to school. Adrien and several members of the Genie IT team came back to ASNA's San Antonio-based training center in the fall of 2003 and took ASNA's five-day class for AVR for .NET. They learned the basics of AVR for .NET as well as the basics of Microsoft's .NET framework. Most of what they had already learned from the previous release of AVR applied, and it didn't take long for the Genie team to get up to speed with AVR for .NET. Like the Classic version of AVR, AVR for .NET retained the basic semantics of RPG but added lots of additional capabilities.

Genie is blessed with an IT team with a disparate set of skills. Programmers with long-time RPG and iSeries skills, Web development skills, and PC development skills all comprise the Genie IT team. AVR for .NET, with its unique blend of capabilities for all three of those environments, was the perfect stamping grounds for Genie's IT team.



"I'm especially happy with the RPG syntax AVR for .NET uses. While it retains the core capabilities of RPG, ASNA has made RPG a first-class, expressive language. I'm a long-time RPG green-screen coder, and I learned ASNA's RPG syntax very quickly--as did our Visual Basic team members," says Adrien. "We were all very productive very quickly with AVR for .NET. And, beyond what ASNA has done with RPG, we quickly learned that AVR for .NET's ASP.NET implementation makes building Web applications orders of magnitude faster and easier than the old ASP model."

Up and Running

With a little AVR for .NET knowledge under his belt, Adrien set out to build the Internet-based customer service application. Knowing only a little about Web development, Adrien leaned heavily on Genie's Dave Wendleton for help. Wendleton is one of Genie's Web experts and was a member of the Genie team who attended the AVR for .NET class. Adrien credits Wendleton with lots of the success of the project.

"Just after completing ASNA's AVR for .NET class, I got started on Genie's new Web-based customer service application. We were very early users of ASNA's AVR for .NET, and I had a couple of frustrating issues finding examples of the kinds of problems I set out to solve. [Since Adrien's project last fall, ASNA has substantially revised and updated AVR for .NET's examples and Help system.] However, once I got over a few initial hurdles, the project progressed nicely," reports Adrien. "In less than a month, I hammered out the basic shell of the new Genie Web application. This was my first attempt at creating a Web application. I'm

a long-time AS/400 RPG programmer and didn't have any trouble with ASNA's RPG dialect in Visual RPG for .NET. I had some tough, Web-related technical issues as I built the Web app, but with Dave Wendleton's already-extensive Web development background and ASNA's technical support, it surprised me how quickly I got productive."

"Genie management was very impressed with our AVR for .NET solution."

Paul Adrien, Genie's software engineer

In less than two months, Adrien deployed his new AVR for .NET call tracking application on the Internet. The new application totally replaces the old back-office bound application. Genie customer issues are now tracked in real time, worldwide.

For Genie, the answer to its Web application problems was obvious: ASNA's Visual RPG for .NET. Its use of RPG, its ability to connect effectively to the AS/400, and ASNA's quality tech support and great training programs all made Visual RPG for .NET an obvious decision for Adrien and the IT team at Genie.

Explains Adrien, "Genie management was very impressed with our AVR for .NET solution. Now, whether a reported problem is up the hill in one of our manufacturing plants or around the globe in Bangladesh, our global service staff is going to know about it and respond to it immediately. And this first app just barely scratches the surface of possibilities for Genie. We already have another team using Visual RPG for .NET to create a Web-based order entry system for everything that Genie sells.

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 a million end users.



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We can get you there

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www.asna.com
contactsales@asna.com