MITEM Case Study · American Electric Power

Because of MitemView's asynchronous architecture and very high performance, we felt that we could improve the design of the user interface.

— MIKE ROZSA, IT MANAGER, AEP

American Electric Power is a multinational energy company based in Columbus, Ohio. AEP owns and operates more than 38,000 megawatts of generating capacity, making it one of America's largest generators of electricity. The company is also a leading wholesale energy marketer and trader, ranking second in the U.S. in electricity volume. AEP provides retail electricity to more than 9 million customers worldwide and has more than $35 billion in assets, primarily in the U.S. with holdings in select international markets. Wholly owned subsidiaries are involved in power engineering and construction services, energy management and telecommunications.

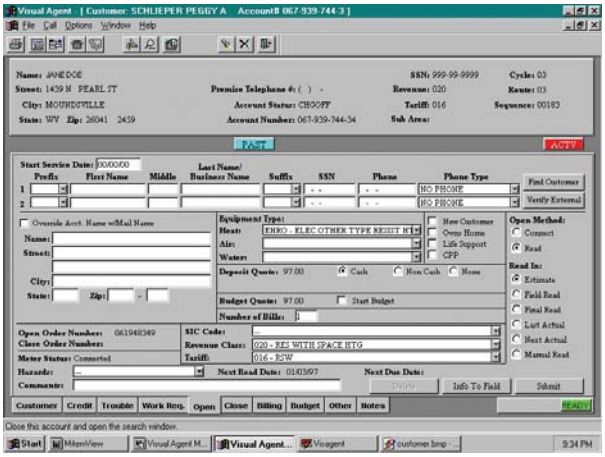
BACKGROUND

In 1995, AEP's Groveport Ohio customer solution center took calls from two of AEP's seven operating companies. Each maintained their respective customer service operations using custom mainframe-based Customer Information Systems (CIS); effectively two customer solution centers operated under one roof. To achieve operational improvements in agent training and service levels, AEP created a new GUI front-end using IBM's VisualAge C++, and used HLLAPI screen scraping as the method to interface with the mainframe. The new GUI front-end added a considerable amount of new functionality, and helped to provide a common look and feel across both systems.

CONSOLIDATION TO ONE SYSTEM

As the next step, AEP decided to construct a new CIS system so that all of AEP's operating companies could share a common application and database. The new system, called MACSS, encompasses key operational functions including Marketing, Accounting, and Customer Service Systems. MACSS is based on IBM's DB2 database and CICS using character-based 3270 terminals. The AEP customer solution center management team was concerned with the significant effort in re-training their customer service agents and losing the benefit of the original GUI application that had improved agent productivity and reduced training time.

The most obvious technical approach to solve this was to "pick-up" the original GUI application and "bolt" it onto MACSS. Upon closer analysis, it was determined that only a very small percentage of the code was reusable due to the tightly coupled HLLAPI interfaces. So, AEP began to consider alternative approaches. "We eliminated the Early Cloud technology because it required us to install new software on the mainframe and modify MACSS", said Mike Rozsa, IT Manager for Customer Service Applications at AEP. "Early Cloud only provided either custom transactions using a FEPPI interface between the workstation and MACSS, or the HLLAPI approach with which we had already experienced performance and reliability issues," said Rozsa.



The Virtual Agent Dream Screen

AEP concluded that the construction and maintenance would be substantially less using a PowerBuilder/ MitemView combination, and it would deliver substantial performance and reliability advantages over the original HLLAPI-based approach. "Because of MitemView's asynchronous architecture and very high performance, we felt that we could improve the design of the user interface," said Rozsa.

MITEMVIEW POWERS THE VIRTUAL AGENT APPLICATION

The project team consisted of 6 people in total. After a 3-day training class, the project began with a plan to implement the application in five phases, beginning with the most important call types—like Account Inquiry. Initially, AEP developed a main customer window that displays 80% of the total account information, including comprehensive data about the customer with the ability for the CSR to update name, mailing address and phone number. In addition, all credit and billing information is displayed. Several visual indicators were also included that quickly informed the agent of special conditions like life support apparatus, check-less payment option, or to indicate that a payment agreement or credit extension existed on the account.

BENEFITS

The final phase was completed on schedule without any reduced application functionality. The new Virtual Agent application has reduced the time to perform the Account Inquiry function, which accesses up to 15 different mainframe 3270 screens, from 30 seconds using the previous HLLAPI approach, to just 6 seconds with MitemView.

AEP enhanced the Virtual Agent application to include CTI Screen Pop, Call Scripting and Call History. Additionally, it now also interfaces with third-party products to perform credit checks and accept check payments over the phone.

SIX CALL CENTERS NOW FUNCTION AS ONE VIRTUAL CALL CENTER

In 2000, AEP announced a merger with Central and Southwest Corp. (CSW). Two years later they began to consolidate CSW's three different instances of their CIS with AEP's MACSS environment. Prior to the completion of the merger, CSW had used MitemView to build a version of Visual Agent to front-end their IDMS mainframe-based system. This application had a similar look and feel to Virtual Agent.

"CSW trained all of their agents on a GUI that looked a lot like our Virtual Agent application. So, when we converted their CIS, they essentially moved from using Visual Agent to our Virtual Agent application. That transition was practically seamless," said Rozsa.

Now, AEP has a total of six Customer Solutions Centers using Virtual Agent; the effect is that all AEP's Solutions Centers now function as a single virtual unit. About 650 customer service associates work in these six centers and collectively handle approximately 14 million calls per year.

MITEMVIEW EXTEND AEP'S CIS TO THE WEB

In December of 2004, AEP went live with an interactive web self-service application that enables customers to sign up for budget billing options. In May of 2005, they added functionality to allow home builders to request installation of new service. Plans for 2005 include the ability for residential customers to open and close an account, report an outage, check account information, and perform other basic functions. These web applications run on a MitemView server that makes updates in real time to MACSS.

MITEM Corporation • 640 Menlo Avenue • Menlo Park, CA 94025 • 1.800.826.4836