MITEM Case Study · Baltimore Gas & Electric

MITEM Software Revitalizes Legacy Customer Information System

GUIdance goes beyond the call center and embodies the holistic approach of the corporation in meeting customers' needs and expectations. Its a strategically essential part of our business moving forward.

BGE

— ALAN STAMBAUGH, IT CONSULTANT FOR BGE

INTRODUCTION

For more than 180 years, Baltimore Gas and Electric (BGE), has supplied power to residents and businesses in Central Maryland. BGE is the nation's first gas utility and one of the earliest electric utilities. The company serves more than one million business and residential electric customers and 600,000 gas customers.

BGE, as part of Constellation Energy, will now focus exclusively on delivering power to customers, while

Constellation will focus on generating and selling power. This new corporate mandate led BGE to take a critical look at its entire customer service operations and reinforce these vital processes to ensure continued success.

"From a business perspective, our challenge was to significantly enhance our customer operations, yet build on the considerable investment we made in our existing customer information system," said Alan Stambaugh, IT consultant for BGE.

CIS ENVIRONMENT

Based on outdated technical underpinnings, BGE's existing customer information system (CIS) had become a bottleneck to efficient customer service. Training time for new call center recruits took 29 weeks because the system was difficult to learn and time-consuming to use. Customer inquiries became more complex and the time it took to access pertinent information to get answers increased. BGE needed a solution that spanned three critical areas: cut training time, decrease actual call time and improve overall processes.

BGE built their CIS in 1989. It was developed with Arthur Andersen and was the first Customer/1 (C1) prototype. C1 handles all of BGE's billing, file maintenance and online access. It runs on an IBM System 390 mainframe and accesses the company's central data warehouse stored on an IBM DB2 database that serves as the company's primary customer information data warehouse.

Since 1989, BGE has made a significant investment in the development and maintenance of its CIS. The company estimates it has spent $100 million total on updates and modifications to meet the continually changing requirements of the utilities industry.

"For us, CIS is very successful software that has served us well from its original deployment until now. The problem is that it is based on outdated technology that assumes each piece of information exists in isolation. This architecture now hinders our ability to access
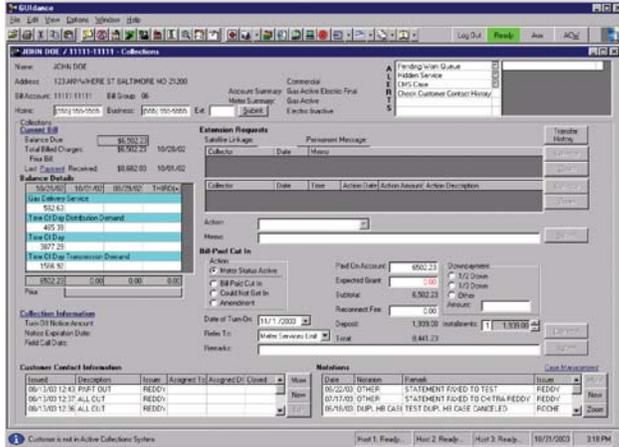
The GUIdance Application

multiple pieces of customer information quickly and easily," said Stambaugh.

To obtain a complete picture of what was needed to answer customer inquiries as efficiently as possible, BGE conducted joint application development sessions that included call center team members, supervisors and trainers. They walked through the customer service processes needed to support every possible call scenario and observed the steps reps took to answer each call.

BGE found that 75 percent of the time, call center reps had to access nine to 12 screens of information to get all the data needed to answer one customer's inquiry. Not only that, but each screen was accessed sequentially, that is, it would be called up, the rep would copy some notes, close that screen and open another, copy down another piece of information, close that screen, etc. BGE realized they needed a more efficient method to access mainframe information.

BGE responded by developing GUIdance, a new application that would serve as an intuitive, easy-to-use interface between their legacy CIS and their customer representatives. GUIdance was built to provide the information call center reps need as efficiently and easily as possible, so they can respond to customers' requests and inquiries more quickly. "GUIdance goes beyond the call center and embodies the holistic approach of the corporation in meeting customers' needs and expectations. It's a strategically essential part of our business moving forward," said Stambaugh.

MITEMVIEW POWERS THE GUIDANCE SOLUTION

To make GUIdance a reality, BGE needed a product that could leverage the investment made in their CIS, i.e., reuse the business rules they already had on mainframe, provide high data acquisition rates, be able to support new applications and get up and running quickly. Mitem View was the only product that met all of these requirements.

Once BGE understood the pieces of information service reps required to complete a process, they built Visual Basic PC screens that use MitemView to make the necessary calls to the mainframe. MitemView accesses the mainframe information and sends it to the Visual Basic programs. MitemView's non-invasive approach means that it easily communicates with the existing CIS, without requiring programmers to write extraneous translation code.

RESULTS

- GUIdance has cut training time from 29 weeks to less than 10 weeks
- new reps enter into service sooner and become productive sooner
- average call handle time has been cut by 7 seconds
- annual savings in customer service operations are more than $1 million

MITEM EXTENDS BGE'S CIS FOR WEB ACCESS

In September of 2004, BGE launched a self-service web application specifically designed for agency workers administering programs for the Office of Home Energy Programs (OHEP). The web application resides on a MitemView server and provides agency workers with real time, direct access to a client's account information and the ability to commit funds. OHEP helps low-income Maryland citizens pay their heating bills, minimize heating crises, and make energy costs more affordable. The new self-service application will be used by approximately 170 agency workers. This deployment will be used as a study for providing other self-service applications for BGE customers.

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