Success Story

BBj Sparks High Productivity At Heilind

In the success story featured in the BASIS International Advantage 1st Quarter 2002, Heilind Electronics was just beginning their first migration into the GUI world. Since then, they not only completed the migration of their Quote Acceleration application, but also successfully implemented GUI into two more applications for their purchasing and credit groups.

By Susan Darling

Specializing in the distribution of interconnect/electro-mechanical parts, Heilind realizes over $300 million each year in sales revenues. Their user count continues to increase along with their sales. Since the last article, their nationwide user base increased from 600 to more than 730. Of these, nearly 170 users access the GUI applications while the remaining users continue to use the character-based applications.

Ed Duclos, Corporate Operations at Heilind explains, "Our particular industry tends to use highly customized legacy applications – off-the-shelf applications just don't meet our needs. We really needed a solution that maintained 15+ years of legacy data." BBj®, BASIS' new generation BBX®, provided a very low risk solution to their needs. This solution offered more screen real estate, preserved compatibility with the existing massive databases, and provided a seamless migration path in which users maintained their productivity while running preceding versions of BBX. Users could even switch from the GUI interface to the character interface, update the information, and easily return to GUI. Today, productivity is at unprecedented heights as Heilind employees efficiently perform their day-to-day transaction and decision-making processes.

Was Visual PRO/5® a viable GUI contender? In this environment, no. According to Chris DeMerchant, project lead in their BBj development, "Visual PRO/5 wasn't really ever considered. We were looking for thin client to support our nationwide offices on one central server. We really were excited about the potential of Java and future projects like implementing Web services." BBj delivers on all these fronts.

Quote Acceleration

Driving Heilind's growing sales effort is a highly-trained sales staff who remotely access the quotation system to assist customers and respond to their pricing requests. To request a quotation, a customer submits their own user-defined Excel spreadsheet containing the details of their request. In the legacy CUI version, the sales person extracted the information manually from one database at a time and one screen at a time, in order to build the quote. Then, they entered the results into the customer's spreadsheet and returned the quote to the customer. This process took a great deal of time and effort. Large quotes might take several weeks to complete.

Today, the customer still sends the same user-defined spreadsheet, but now the sales person imports it directly into a BBj application using SDOffice. Then, they write the pertinent columns of data to a standard BASIS Database System file and process the file. The results assist the sales person in pricing modifications based on manufacturer and other key criteria. Once the sales person completes the quotation, he or she exports the data back into the original customer spreadsheet and returns the file to the customer.

Over 120 users access this system throughout the day with about 12 users running concurrently. Sales people access this quotation application from anywhere in the country with MS Terminal Services Clients using BBj's Thin Client architecture. The quotation application produces staggering productivity gains. A large 800+ line item quotation that formerly took 2-3 weeks to

complete on the legacy system, now just takes a few days to complete. The new system delivers a five-fold increase in performance over the old system.

Powerful. Flexible. BBj delivers.

P/O Builder

In the CUI version of this application, buyers depended solely on a nightly report known as the buy card. Each morning they reviewed the buy card printout to determine which part numbers required attention. Then the buyer laboriously queried one database screen after another (**Figure 1**) to gather enough information about that part number to determine whether to reorder.

In today's application, the nightly process generates an electronic file of all products that require the buyer's attention, sortable by priority and action required. The application presents each item, one at a time, in an expansive GUI screen. This graphical screen utilizes more than 600% more screen real estate than the old 80x25 character screen.

This screen, shown in **Figure 2**, displays all the related databases, grouped by similar functions, needed to determine which products require reordering. These databases include outstanding purchase orders, open customer orders, costing, sales price, and demand history. The user views each database by clicking on the
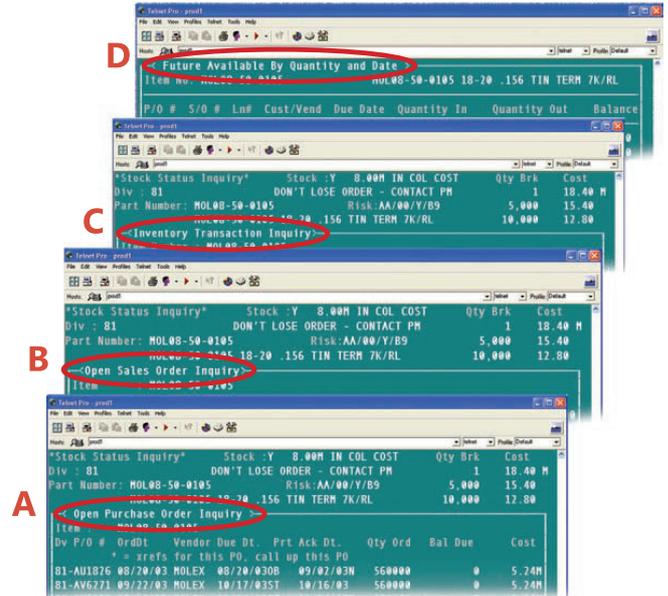

Figure 1. Legacy screens in character mode

associated tab. If an item requires purchasing, the buyer generates the PO directly from the all-purpose screen.

The results are remarkable. "We experienced a 300% increase in productivity when generating a purchase order. And, with the application presenting the parts in question, the system generates POs with 95% accuracy. Before, one wrong digit could order the wrong part or quantity, potentially resulting in a very costly mistake," adds Chris. The new system equips the buyer with the ability to make an informed decision easily and quickly, often saving more money by buying at supplier quantity price breaks. In addition, the system reduces and simplifies the time required to train new buyers, resulting in smarter, more accurate decisions.

Ed continues, "BBj is a bit of a godsend. With BBj, we extended the shelf life of an old legacy application that had gone just about as far as we could take it in the character world. I'd say it was a terrific find."
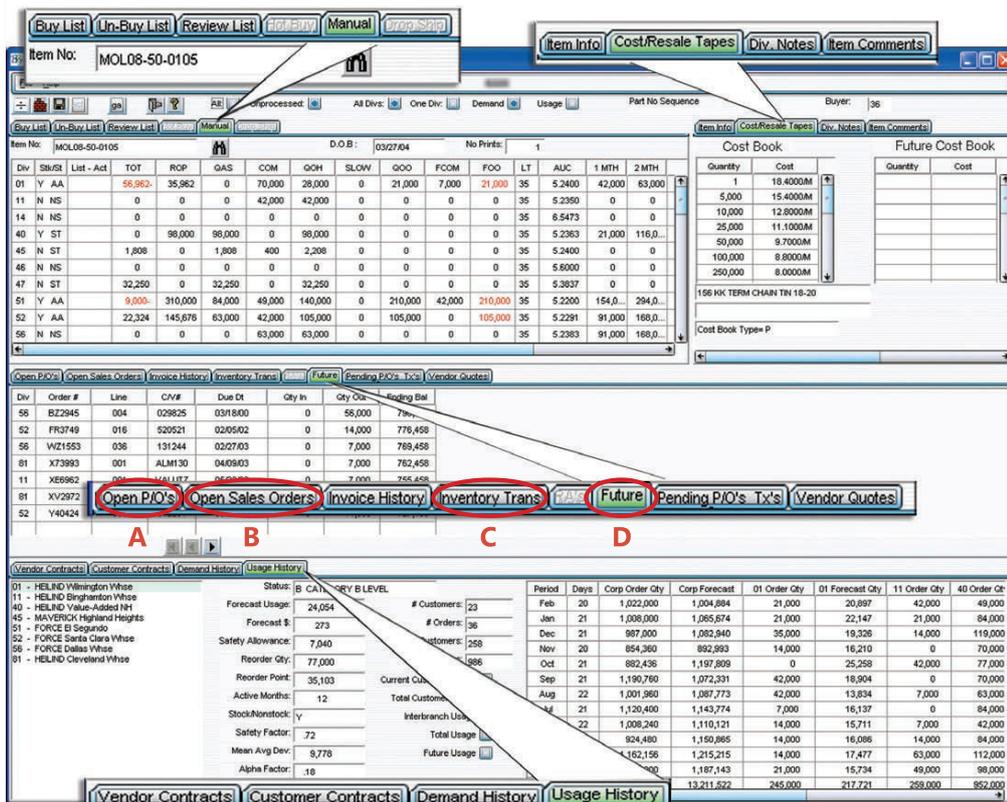

Figure 2. Graphical screens with direct tab access to multiple reports and databases including those shown in Figure 1

P/O Builder runs on Microsoft Windows NT operating system powered by two 1.8 MHz CPUs with 4 GB memory. Approximately 40 concurrent users access the application using MS Terminal Services.

Powerful. Flexible. BBj delivers.

Credit Cockpit

Similar to the character-based version of P/O Builder, the credit analysts relied on a myriad of nightly reports such as aged trial balance, credit review reports, etc., to determine a suitable customer follow-up action. Some customers required some level of credit review, or perhaps they just needed a follow-up call about their credit application, or an extension to their credit limit, or a friendly collections call.

Combining GUI with the power of BBj, the new Credit Cockpit equips the credit analysts with all the tools needed to manage Heilind's credit control in an informed, responsive, and accurate way. Just as in P/O Builder, an electronic report automatically flags each customer requiring review and displays it on a screen with over 20 different tabs of data to aid in the decision making process. Approximately 12 con-current users access this application, hosted on the same server as the P/O Builder.

This broadened application also provides the analysts with the means to prevent potential problems. Identifying changes in customer payment patterns may prompt a courtesy phone call to avoid a possible delinquent payment. Recognizing a customer is approaching their credit limit alerts the analyst to review the account and possibly upgrade their credit limit to maintain smooth, uninterrupted fulfillment processing.

Because the GUI version is much more intuitive and provides easy access to a wealth of information, it reduces training costs for new users. In the old CUI application, it was very difficult for an analyst to assist a customer whose assigned analyst was out of the office. Today, the new comprehensive application makes coverage easy and proficient, regardless of the availability of the assigned analyst. Measurable results since the implementation of the Credit Cockpit include:

- Reduced credit limit issues, resulting in fewer orders on credit hold
- Reduced past due dollars "Over 90 days," resulting in overall improved cash position
- Reduced Days Sales Outstanding (DSO), resulting in overall improved cash flow

Robust. Proven. BBj delivers.

Sales Cockpit

With such astounding results, Heilind began building a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) application in BBj. Their goal is to develop a comprehensive custom CRM for their nationwide sales force of over 200. Ed explains, "For CRM, there are many off-the-shelf applications that could work. We researched broader options but quickly saw that BBj offers the best of both worlds. Building CRM in BBj gives us the inherent advantage of a solution right on top of our legacy data and allows us to write it to mimic the mainstream applications our sales people need."
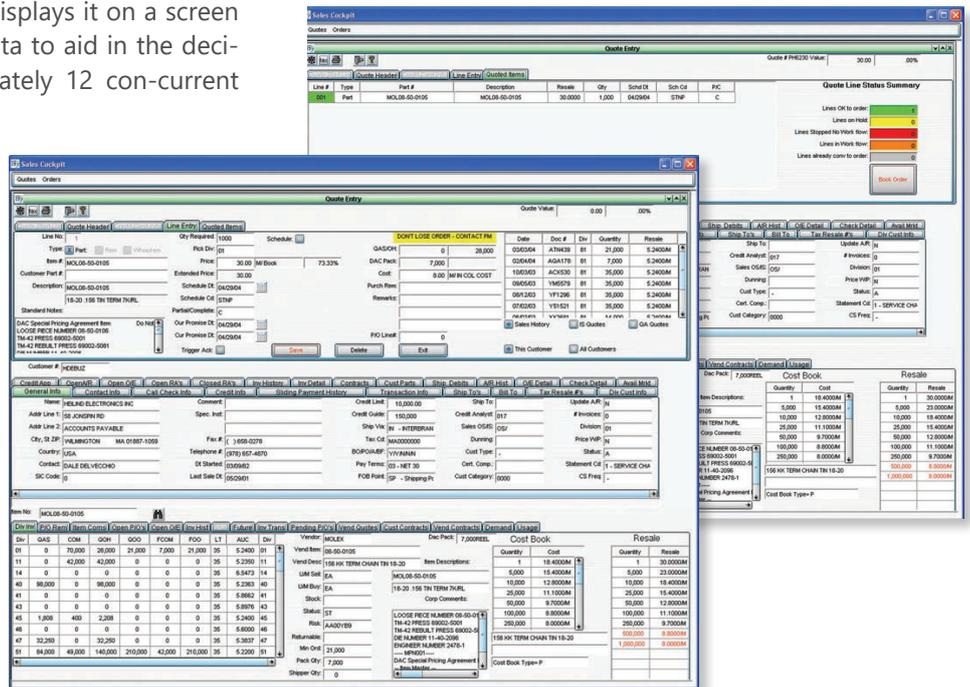

Figure 3. Prototype screens for Sales Cockpit.

Scheduled for release early next year, this application combines traditional CRM information with existing sections extracted from the P/O Builder and Credit Cockpit applications as shown in **Figure 3**. This expansive application will equip each sales person with numerous tools in one single application. Once this application goes into production, 90% of Heilind's non-manufacturing and warehouse users will be using BBj.

Dynamic. Proven. BBj delivers.

In conjunction with their first application migration, Heilind upgraded to a P650 with 24 CPUs and 100 GB of memory running the IBM AIX operating system. Preliminary testing on this upgraded system and new Power 4 processor chip resulted in less than optimal performance caused by a high number of instruction emulations. IBM and BASIS teamed up to determine the cause for this problem and solved it in the release of an optimized new AIX port. Support for the Power 4 chip is now part of the current PRO/5 AIX port.

Committed. Determined. BASIS delivers.

This installation is a real-world example of how BASIS products serve large countrywide multiuser applications, afford tremendous productivity gains, and provide a smooth transition to the world of GUI. If you are considering extending the life of your legacy application, perhaps this example of the use of proven, reliable, low risk, and highly scalable BASIS technology is the encouragement you need to go forward with BBj.

"Electrifying" is most often associated with the world of electronics, but at Heilind, "electrifying" describes the power of BBj and results they receive from using BASIS products. ■

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About us

BASIS International

We are a global software company – large and stable enough to be a reliable partner for thousands of companies worldwide, yet small and flexible enough to deliver tailored solutions that meet today's business challenges.

For almost 40 years (20+ years of delivering technology built on Java), BASIS International has been a trusted partner, delivering software tools and frameworks to develop and modernize mission-critical business systems for both large international corporations and SMEs. More than 1.2 million users worldwide rely on IT solutions created by BASIS or its customers and partners, specifically tailored to meet individual requirements.

With offices in North America and Europe, as well as partnerships in over 30 countries, BASIS is well-positioned internationally. The "big little software company" is privately owned and independently operated.

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