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Relay Software creates integrated insurance broker system using DBPronto

Relay needed to create a unified database so that information could be shared between existing and new applications.

The Client

For 20 years Relay has been developing leading-edge software business solutions for insurance brokers. With offices in Belfast and Dublin, its strategic focus has always been on helping insurance brokers run their businesses in a more efficient and productive manner. Relay provides the means to exploit business opportunities more effectively.

The Challenge

Relay's main Insurance Broker System has been developed over the past 20 years using the COBOL language and its ISAM flat files for data storage. However, Relay recently developed a new Life Insurance Broker product running in a .NET environment utilising an SQL Server database.

In order to share information between the two applications, Relay identified a requirement to have data from both systems stored in a single SQL Server database. This would provide significant benefits, such as the ability to sell the new Life System to their existing brokers, and improved analysis and reporting. It would also increase accuracy by using a single copy of clients' details.

The Solution

Once Relay had identified the need for a unified database for both applications, they contacted us having read about our DBPronto product.

One major problem they faced was being able to translate the COBOL Input and Output (I/O) statements to SQL Server access without major changes to the COBOL code. This would involve many months of development work changing all the embedded data access statements.

Also key was the ability to match the COBOL data items to the new .NET application's database schema.

When simply moving the COBOL data structures to a relational database, DBPronto provides an automated method of creating the metadata layer and populating the database, in a simple two-step process.

Initially the COBOL sources are scanned and thedata definitions extracted. These are then used to build a model of the COBOL record structure and field definitions which then create the database schema.

Once this has been performed, DBPronto's automated extract and load facility transfers all of the data, file by file, to the new database.

Client >
Relay Software

Sector >
Software

Project >
Application Modernisation

"Advanced has experience of dealing with application vendors through its 30-year history of providing integration products and services. It has enabled them to address not only our technical requirements, but also our business needs."

Alastair Bell >
Managing Director >
Relay Software >

CASE STUDY

Relay creates integrated insurance broker system

In Relay's case it wasn't this simple, as the SQL Server database already existed. The extracted COBOL data model had to be manually modified to match the existing SQL Server database definitions.

Paul Dickson, Senior Developer at Relay Software, comments: *"It wasn't just a case of translating each COBOL record to a database table; we had to use the existing Life System's SQL Server Schema and match the items to the COBOL definitions.*

The flexibility afforded by the metadata layer, and the assistance provided during our initial testing and development, was exceptional.

The method of intercepting the COBOL I/O at runtime meant that we didn't have to make any changes to the COBOL sources, which was vital as we wanted a quick, easy and non-intrusive method to access the new database."

Alastair Bell, Managing Director at Relay Software, says: *"Advanced has experience of dealing with application vendors through its 30-year history of providing integration products and services. This enabled them to address not only our technical requirements, but also our business needs as an applications vendor.*

This ensured that we were able to create a customised pricing model to reflect the value that this solution would have to our end users. It also helped us to define a roll-out schedule for the new integrated product."

Tim Jones of Advanced sums up: *"The great strength of our DBPronto product is the flexibility provided by the underlying architecture. Through having a separate Client and Server portion, we are able to provide optimal performance and unrivalled scalability without overloading the database connections.*

This, combined with the metadata layer matching the COBOL layouts to the database schema, enables us to not only move COBOL files and records into the database, but also to access an existing database schema with COBOL style statements. Doing all of this without having to change a line of COBOL code was key to assisting Relay to meet the needs of their end users."

"We wanted a quick, easy and non-intrusive method to access the new database."

Paul Dickson >
Senior Developer >
Relay Software

More information

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