

SkilStaf Inc.

SkilStaf uses ASNA Visual RPG for its document management system



SkilStaf, Inc. is the largest employee-leasing company in Alabama and one of the largest in the United States. With approximately 500 customers located in 29 states, SkilStaf specializes in performing outsourced human resources-related tasks, such as payroll, workers' compensation, and insurance for a variety of different kinds of businesses.

As you might imagine, this kind of work is paper-intensive. Literally hundreds of forms, many with binding legal signatures, must be shuffled from one desk to another. In the old days, paper sufficed, and file cabinets were opened and closed all day long. Today, though, nearly 900,000 documents representing four million pages need to be available to all SkilStaf employees in real time. Paper alone clearly won't do. SkilStaf solved its paper-handling problem by developing an in-house document storage and retrieval system with ASNA Visual RPG (AVR).

From the Ground Up with AVR

Steve Robinson fulfills a variety of responsibilities and positions at SkilStaf, one of which is system administrator. As such, he was intimately involved in the construction of SkilStaf's AVR-based document system. Steve and his team had looked long and deep at third-party documentation storage and retrieval systems. While there were many good ones, they were all very expensive, and all were missing one or more features important to SkilStaf.

Says Steve, "We had an in-house development team with RPG experience. We were also familiar with ASNA Visual RPG because we had used it on a couple of smaller projects. We sat down with the development team and identified what we needed our document system to do. We determined that AVR could indeed provide the tools we needed to build our own very effective system."

With previous AVR experience under their belts, SkilStaf didn't even consider other products for the task. They were familiar with AVR and its capabilities, as well as with the quality education and training ASNA offered.

"Our previous experience with AVR and a few discussions with ASNA's tech support team convinced us that AVR would do what we needed," continues Steve.

All the Features Needed

One of the reasons that the SkilStaf team found AVR to be such a great tool for them is its flexible database access. SkilStaf is a long-time AS/400 shop, but by the end of 2004, it will have moved all its apps off the AS/400 and hosted them on Windows servers. SkilStaf needed a tool that would let its users seamlessly connect to either the AS/400 or databases residing on a Windows server. AVR apps connect, without change, to the AS/400-iSeries, Microsoft's SQL Server, or ASNA's own Windows-based database. This multi-platform database support was key to the SkilStaf document system's success.

In addition to its multiple database support, AVR also proved adept at connecting to a variety of off-the-shelf Windows-based applications.

Says Steve, "We needed seamless integration of our legacy reporting with many different third-party applications--and their associated DLLs and OCXes. AVR's ability to communicate with these applications was very important to us.

"Our move to Windows is strategic for us. Virtually all our clients are Windows-based, and we need to be where they are. We need to offer the features and integration they demand. AVR lets us do just that."

One of the unique challenges the SkilStaf development team worked to solve was integrating all the various system and end-user permissions with the various ways an end-user might use the SkilStaf system. The security problem was ultimately solved by implementing a "roaming" user profile configuration. Once authenticated, this system grants the user authority at the right levels and to the right objects.

The SkilStaf document storage and retrieval system was originally written as a traditional fat Windows client. SkilStaf minimizes some of the

AT A GLANCE

Customer Profile

With approximately 500 customers located in 29 states, SkilStaf specializes in performing outsourced human resources-related tasks, such as payroll, workers' compensation, and insurance for a variety of different kinds of businesses.

Situation

SkilStaf needed to make 900,000 documents representing four million pages available to all staff employees in real time. The success of the project depended on selecting a tool that would let its users seamlessly connect to either the AS/400 or databases residing on a Windows server.

Solution

SkilStaf selected ASNA Visual RPG, developed an in-house document storage and retrieval system and solved their paper-handling problem.

Benefits

- The move to Windows is a strategic success as virtually all of their clients are Windows-based.
- This new applications allows them to provide exactly what their customers want.

Products

- AVR.NET
- DataGate
- IBM iSeries
- OS/400
- DB2/400
- Visual Studio .NET

typical deployment grief that a traditional Windows client provides by serving the application up using Windows Terminal Server.

Looking into the Crystal Ball

In the future, though, SkilStaf is excited about ASNA's upcoming Visual RPG for .NET.

"Our strategy is to move in the .NET direction. Ultimately, offering a browser-based Web user interface is very important to us. We feel strongly that with that interface in play, we could easily move our product to its next natural level of features and functionality," explains Steve.

Steve further explains, "As we look back on our system and the way its development evolved, we wish now we had thought a little broader than we did. At the time, we were brewing an in-house application specifically for SkilStaf. However, we've since realized the market potential for our solution to work for a variety of other document-centric businesses. We've broadened the product a bit and demoed it to several potential third-party licensees. It turns out that the document storage and retrieval system we built with AVR solves more problems than we ever envisioned it would!"

As a mature solution, the SkilStaf AVR-based document storage and retrieval system allows for viewing, printing, copying, emailing, faxing, or storing any document. It assists any organization with efficient document and information management--and the elimination of paper.

The IT department of SkilStaf operates as Management Control, Inc., a subsidiary of the parent company. AVR-based applications and supporting services are marketed through Management Control, Inc.

About ASNA

Established in 1982, San Antonio-based ASNA develops and markets unique software products that evolve IBM AS/400 and iSeries/i5 systems. Aligned with Microsoft's .NET initiative, ASNA is the only company to offer a thoroughly conceived, standards-based extension and migration path that solves its customers' business challenges. For more information about ASNA: <http://www.asna.com/>.

Most recently, ASNA joined Microsoft in founding the Midrange Alliance Program, a strategic initiative to help enterprises worldwide reduce

the risks and high cost of maintaining, extending and migrating aging IBM midrange systems. The alliance establishes the technical foundation for these enterprises to efficiently move to .NET and includes ASNA products as cornerstone enabling technologies. For more on the Midrange Alliance Program: <http://www.microsoft.com/midrange/>.



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