

Wyandot Inc.

Wyandot solves snack production problem in one week with ASNA Visual RPG



Wyandot, Inc. is a 69-year-old snack food producer and distributor with production facilities in Marion, Ohio and Jeffersonville, Indiana. Wyandot used ASNA Visual RPG for .NET and Microsoft's .NET Visual Studio to create a new iSeries-based production scheduling system--in one week! This new program enabled Wyandot to avoid purchasing a \$100,000 vertical software package expense. It also put the Wyandot IT team more directly in charge of the software that drives the Wyandot production facilities. Wyandot's new ASNA Visual RPG-based daily production scheduling system is the foundation for many new production-related software enhancements, all of which will be done in-house by the Wyandot IT team using AVR for .NET.

Wyandot, Inc. has spent 69 years as the leading private label manufacturer of salted snacks. With more than 150 million pounds of total annual capacity, Wyandot obviously ships *lots* of snacks in a year. To ship those millions of snacks yearly, Wyandot needs a superb production scheduling system.

Bob Shaw, Wyandot's Manager of Information Services, explains, "In the old days, with fewer production lines and less constraints on inventory levels, production scheduling didn't need to be a very sophisticated process. However, as our business matured so did our production scheduling complexities." With the capabilities of the old time green screen scheduling application quickly timing out, Wyandot's production scheduling process evolved into a miasma of complex Excel spreadsheets. To lift itself out of an enterprise dependency on Excel for production purposes, Wyandot turned to ASNA Visual RPG for .NET to create a Windows application that connects directly to its line-of-business iSeries.

When the chips are down

With the realization that the spreadsheet-based solution required excessive manual manipulation and wasn't robust and reliable enough, Shaw and other members of the Wyandot IT team carefully pondered the unique challenges they needed a new production application to solve. The primary

facilities the new production system needed to provide were:

- a vastly improved user interface that would ensure product scheduling correctness as well as eliminate existing redundant data entry requirements
- a real-time, read/write iSeries connection for data validation and inventory on-hand levels
- a direct interface with Wyandot's iSeries-based ERP package, PRISM
- the ability to create and distribute a variety of production-related schedules and reports, by shift

Bob and his team understood that their new application needed a rich, expressive, and friendly user interface; this translated, almost without saying, to knowing they needed a Windows graphical user interface. Explains Shaw, "All of our operators are familiar with Windows applications. We knew the green screen couldn't provide the rich interface we needed so the Windows GUI was simply a de facto part of our application specifications. That interface would be easy to teach and provide all the real-time error handling, data validation, and user feedback we needed."

Acquiring that rich user interface, though, could not come at the expense of a real-time iSeries connection. Wyandot is a hard-core iSeries shop—all their enterprise data is, and has been for years, iSeries bound. Thus, in addition to the Windows GUI, their new production scheduling application needed a reliable, fast, and secure iSeries database connection.

With specifications in hand, Shaw's team turned their attention to selecting a product with which to build their new solution. ASNA Visual RPG for .NET (AVR) quickly acquired a place at the top of the list. The Wyandot team had experience with the older COM-based version of AVR and AVR for .NET was a natural fit for them. Says Shaw, "We knew that our application needed a rock-solid interface to our iSeries platform. Through our previous experiences with ASNA, we knew its products were a good fit for us—we've been very

AT A GLANCE

Customer Profile

With 69 years as the leading private label manufacturer of salted snacks and more than 150 million pounds of total annual capacity, Wyandot, must sustain a sophisticated and reliable scheduling system.

Situation

As Wyandot's business matured, so did the production scheduling complexities, evolving into an unmanageable process requiring manual manipulation of complex spreadsheets.

Solution

In just one week, using AVR .NET, RPG programmers were able to develop sophisticated iSeries applications that included user-friendly Windows Interfaces and full integration with their ERP applications.

Benefits

- Saved more than \$100,000 by developing in house
- Used existing programming resources
- Improved user productivity and delivered much-needed functionality: using existing RPG programming resources.

Products

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

happy with ASNA DataGate for years." ASNA DataGate is the iSeries-based component that AVR uses to connect to the iSeries. DataGate provides Shaw's team with read/write record-level access and a superb OS/400 program call facility.

In addition to its iSeries connectivity, AVR offered other pluses to Shaw and his team. Because AVR for .NET is able to create native Windows interfaces (AVR comes with *many* sophisticated Windows user interface components), AVR was perfectly situated to solve two of Wyandot's biggest production scheduling issues. AVR's RPG foundation was also a good fit for Wyandot. In fact, it was AVR's RPG heritage that first attracted the Wyandot IT team to ASNA and its family of products.

"With a team of RPG programmers, it only made sense to us to use a product based on RPG," explains Shaw. He continues, "Our programmers learned AVR quickly--partly on their own, partly with ASNA's tech support help, and partly by attending ASNA's annual ASNApalooza developer conference." With AVR, Wyandot's programmers were able to quickly build sophisticated Windows applications. ASNA's simple but sophisticated approach leads the Wyandot team to enterprise solutions much faster and more affordably than using tools such as Java and WebSphere.

On to the deliverable

The task of creating the new production scheduling system was assigned to Eric Watkins, a Wyandot Programmer/Analyst. Although Eric had limited exposure to AVR for .NET, he is an accomplished programmer with five-plus years experience in RPG, Visual Basic, and COBOL. With this background and lots of enthusiasm, Eric rolled up his sleeves and got busy. To Shaw's amazement in just one week Watkins delivered a working version of the Production Scheduling application.

Shaw proudly says, "I was very impressed with how quickly Eric built the initial version of our new production scheduling system. He designed the user interface to nearly anticipate where a user's fingertips would be next. We had excellent user acceptance of the new application. And, because the application connects directly to our iSeries, database updates are immediate and reliable. Redundant data entry was no longer needed to keep our production schedules

humming!" Watkins was also able to add the needed integration to Wyandot's ERP solution as well as use AVR's built-in print file editor to build the necessary production schedule reports. These reports are printed to Windows laser printers or directly to PDF (with all the fancy attributes a Windows laser printer provides, such as fonts and images).

Back in the chips

Shaw is rightfully very proud of Wyandot's new production scheduling system. With Eric Watkins's efforts and ASNA AVR for .NET, the new application was delivered in time and on target. On the business payoff of this new system, Shaw reports, "It's hard to put a dollar figure on the worth of our new production scheduling system; but I can tell you at the very least, it clearly helped us avoid the cost of a \$100,000 third-party product. We expect the return on investment of our new application to do nothing but grow from there." Next up for Wyandot with AVR are inventory availability checks for seasonings, packaging materials, and cartons. This includes issuing picking lists for these materials to be delivered to the finished goods packaging area.

Perhaps an even bigger measure of the short-term success of the new production scheduling system is the longer-term foundation it lays for Wyandot. Because Shaw's team maintains complete control over the system, it provides the foundation for future enhancements such as identifying upcoming inventory problems, targeting labor requirements, and determining packaging needs. These are all things that are now easily within reach of the Wyandot IT team because ASNA AVR puts them in control.

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



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ASNA Visual RPG for .NET ASNA DataGate



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/>.