CASE STUDY

RZ Verden

Improving the Breed Through Enhanced Document Management

A specialty IT outsourcer needed a smooth migration path from their mainframe-based printing and archiving systems to their new Linux environment. Enterprise Output Management software from Levi, Ray & Shoup, Inc. helps the organization provide seamless delivery of critical documents in hardcopy and online form.

rzv
Ihr Rechenzentrum Verden

When sitting around the dinner table, few people stop to think of all the processes involved in bringing the delicious food to their plates. For various commercial and public health reasons, certain types of food production involve an extraordinary amount of documentation and information technology.

Organization

Rechenzentrum Verden GmbH (rzv) is an IT outsourcer serving the agency that tracks livestock transactions throughout Germany and Luxemburg. Working on behalf of the umbrella organization vit (Vereinigte Informationssysteme Tierhaltung w.V.), it develops and manages a variety of custom applications used to support those who care for herds of cattle, horses, swine, sheep and goats, as well as other animals not raised for consumption.

"Passport, please"

For decades, farmers have relied on written records to improve the health and productivity of their herds. Every aspect of the animal's life – from breeding to birth, transport, sale, and slaughter – is documented and analyzed.

Capturing such information is not just useful; it is mandated by law. "Every animal is issued an individual document, the equivalent of a passport for a human," says Bernd Bogena, IT Department Leader at RZ Verden. "Without it, the animal cannot be transported or sold. Being able to track the full life history of each animal enables officials to limit the spread of contagious diseases and helps farmers better manage their livestock herds."

IT in Transition

Tracking and accounting for millions of animals requires specialized systems. Understandably, no off-the-shelf software is available to address these unique business requirements. vit's skilled team of IT professionals handles in-house development and support of this custom-tailored software.

"Since the 1960's, we had always been a mainframe shop," explains Bogena. "But even with 1,000 users and thousands of custom programs, we've always run one of the smallest mainframe tiers." In order to save on costs, vit and rzv made the strategic decision to migrate their systems to the Linux platform.

Core applications were re-architected and updated to take full advantage of the open source environment. Gone were countless text screens, replaced by custom-designed web interfaces. But in all the 'build-versus-buy' discussions during the Linux migration, the need for an external output management system was clear.

"We briefly considered building a document management solution on our own, as we are used to creating our own systems," says Bogena. "But we knew that time spent on developing an output management system would be better spent rewriting our core business applications."

Packaged solution, unique requirements

Prior to their downsizing effort, rzv's mainframe applications had been generating reports, animal passports, and other documents. For over a decade, the company relied on VPS® software from Levi, Ray & Shoup, Inc. (LRS) for assured delivery of critical application output.

"Even though we're a small shop, we feel we've got a great symbiotic partnership with LRS," explains Bogena. "Our business is unique, so we try things that other customers are not likely to

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attempt. The base LRS solutions are usually flexible enough to accommodate our needs without modification. When they're not, LRS has been very open to addressing our enhancement requests."

After evaluating competitive products, Bogena's team selected LRS' Linux-based VPSX® software to replace their mainframe output management solution. The decision was based on more than just vendor familiarity; over the years, rzv had developed more than 1700 custom overlays using IBM's Advanced Function Presentation (AFP) architecture. The VPSX solution's ability to convert existing AFP resources to PDF files and printer-ready data streams eliminated the need to redesign many forms from scratch. "This saved us thousands of costly developer hours," explains Bogena.

Taking the long view

Having implemented VPSX software for their printed output, the rzv team next turned their attention toward their document storage requirements. Chief among these was the need to replace their mainframe-based LDMS archival system. Once again, the team evaluated several Linux-based packages, eventually choosing the PageCenterX® software solution.

Documents from legacy and distributed systems are imported into the PageCenterX archive, where they are compressed and indexed for efficient storage and retrieval. Integration with VPSX software enables seamless hardcopy and electronic document delivery. The standard PageCenterX solution also provides a powerful browser based interface for system administration and a streamlined user interface.

In addition to these interfaces, there is one other way to access stored documents. The PageCenterX solution includes a flexible application programming interface (API), enabling companies like vit to create custom Java applications with direct access to information stored in the PageCenterX database.

"This is an example of where our unique requirements helped drive the improvement of an LRS product," explains Bogena. "We've worked with LRS technical staff to perfect the communication between PageCenterX, our LDAP security system, and our Linux-based business applications. No vendor solution could meet these requirements out of the box, but LRS worked with us to build a system that helps our end users do their jobs."

From glass house to auction house

Impressive as this technical integration may sound, the real value of the solution is its effect on real world business processes.

Picture a truck driver arriving at a remote cattle lot to load dozens of cattle and transport them to auction or to the slaughterhouse. Now imagine the scene when the driver realizes several of the animals are missing their identification papers, or the transport order specifies too many steers.

Without the proper documentation, no animals can be moved or sold. Neither the rancher nor the truck driver receives the expected amount of compensation. The ability to quickly reprint the missing documents can transform tons of unproductive – and unhappy – inventory into valuable business assets.

Ensuring the profitability of the European livestock industry and protecting the public health requires reliable, timely document delivery. With the help of LRS output management software, rzv and vit are meeting the challenge.