EFCO: DELIVERING NEW FUNCTIONALITY WITH ANNUAL SAVING OF $100,000

Visual COBOL delivers an efficient global ERP solution

URL: www.efcoforms.com
Industry: Manufacturing
Country: USA
Partner: Unicon

Highlights

- Annual cost savings of over $100,000
- Up to 50% performance improvement for batch transactions
- Simplified IT infrastructure
- New functionality for international operations
- One global ERP system

"Re-hosting our Bull Mainframe ERP system to a Windows environment using Visual COBOL has delivered an annual cost savings of $100,000 and a steady improvement in batch job performance."

Scott Walter,
IT Project Manager, EFCO

At a glance: EFCO

EFCO provides products and services to the construction industry for efficient forming of concrete and concrete support systems. EFCO has grown into an international operation. With manufacturing facilities in the United States and Canada, and sales offices offices around the world, it is the global concrete forming system of choice for many.

Solution:

- Micro Focus Visual COBOL for Visual Studio
- Micro Focus COBOL Server

Challenge

EFCO has been using a Bull mainframe system to support its business processes for the last 60 years. A key component of its IT infrastructure is a comprehensive ERP system, written in COBOL, responsible for inventory, manufacturing orders, engineering lists, shipping and receiving, and many other business functions. Its 300 users within the North American operations fully rely on this ERP system to service customers and fulfill their job responsibilities. For EFCO, its ERP system is a business-critical application which must be available at all times.

When Bull started to slowly reduce its technical services and maintenance support from North America, EFCO was soon re-directed to Bull's operations center in France. This proved to be a business and logistical challenge in managing IT and systems support issues. Meanwhile, the costs of maintaining and supporting the Bull mainframe environment were steadily increasing.

EFCO had also started new application development efforts in Microsoft .NET and found maintaining those integration points between the Bull mainframe and the .NET environment very complex and resource intensive. A new approach was needed to improve IT service and support, reduce costs and simplify technology between business systems.

There was a key driver for change, as Scott Walter, IT Project Manager at EFCO, explains: "When we developed our Bull mainframe ERP system, EFCO was very much focused on its North American operations. During the 1980s we wrote a limited-functionality version of the ERP system for distributed use in our international locations, with no integration between the two environments.

Since then we've made several system enhancements, but none of these capabilities were available to our international locations. We had a growing functionality gap between sites.

"In the meantime, we have expanded our international operations. We felt we were doing a disservice to our international colleagues because we couldn't extend the same business functionality to them which was available in our North America based systems. Given all these business drivers we looked at moving our Bull mainframe ERP system to a distributed environment, running on Windows and .NET."

Moving to a modern architecture

EFCO examined several alternatives and even rewrote the order entry modules within its ERP system. Walter and the team experienced first-hand how challenging and time-consuming a complete application re-write would be. EFCO also realized that its existing integration with the mainframe was highly complex and hard to maintain, resulting in delays to the business and user acceptance issues. The existing ERP system had been customized so much over the years that it was impossible to replace with a commercial package (COTS).

After discussions with Micro Focus business partner Unicon, EFCO conducted a Proof-of-Concept with Micro Focus Visual COBOL for Visual Studio, supported by Micro Focus Professional Services. The POC proved that the existing ERP business rules on the Bull Mainframe could be moved to a distributed architecture, running on Windows and without impacting end users. With Unicon providing Bull Mainframe subject matter expertise and in charge of moving 500,000 lines of codes to Visual COBOL, EFCO implemented a testing and validation process in preparation for production. EFCO wanted to be confident that all existing batch execution and data processing scenarios were in good order and met quality and acceptance testing standards.

Significant business benefits

Since using Visual COBOL, the most significant benefit has been the immediate business cost savings. Walter comments: "Maintaining and supporting the ERP system using Visual COBOL within a Windows environment has resulted in an annual cost saving of over $100,000. We've also noticed a performance improvement in our batch jobs. One of our longest running batch jobs has improved by 50% which is great news for us and our customers. We also appreciate how much easier it is to maintain and manage our ERP system using Visual COBOL for Visual Studio and even though development productivity wasn't one of our original business drivers, we can already see how we will save time on future development efforts.

"Although the application re-hosting project objective was to make the move transparent to our end users, we are now looking to future ERP development efforts where the use of modern tools will offer new opportunities to deliver a better user interface and end user experience."

Working as one team

For EFCO's North American operations this re-hosting project has delivered great benefit – faster performance, access to modern development tools, and a technology platform built for the future. For its international operations however, the change will be progressive as the company works to deliver one global ERP system. The international ERP system roll-out is planned as a phased project, but as Walter says: "It's hard to really overstate the value of a common ERP system globally. Visual COBOL has given us the opportunity to not only deliver significant IT cost savings, but finally offer the same consistent business functionality across geographies and work together as one corporate team."

About Micro Focus

Micro Focus, a member of the FTSE 250, provides innovative software that allows companies to dramatically improve the business value of their enterprise applications. Micro Focus Enterprise Application Modernization, Testing and Management software enables customers' business applications to respond rapidly to market changes and embrace modern architectures with reduced cost and risk.

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