

SEAMLESS TRANSITION

Apparel giant Leadtec Systems, Inc. makes a silky smooth move to open systems from AS400

When the market you serve starts to change before your eyes, you have to be ready to change with it.

This was the problem faced by Leadtec Systems, Inc., a provider of turn-key software and specialized hardware for apparel manufacturers. With a large share of its market leaving the United States for Central and South America, Leadtec needed to continue to compete for their business, which meant migrating its applications from an IBM AS/400 environment to a UNIX-based PC platform.

Leadtec Systems, Inc., with offices in Atlanta, GA, Canoga Park, CA, and Mexico, was founded in 1978 to provide clothing producers a complete package for monitoring and managing the work of apparel personnel. A division of Willcox & Gibbs, Leadtec is "the world leader in plant-floor software for the apparel industry." The heart of Leadtec's product line is Satellite Plus™ which is in use at over 200 apparel plants worldwide and is the "most complete real-time plant information and control system available." The multi-Satellite Plus™ originally consisted of real-time terminals for providing operator feedback and motivation, an IBM AS/400 host computer, and a network manager for communicating with the terminals. The Satellite Plus™ Software was written in IBM COBOL/400.

A Changing World

Though the product has been the apparel industry's standard since 1988, Leadtec found that a changing world demanded adaptations to the Satellite Plus™ configuration. Much of the business that would have been part of Leadtec's North American market was relocating to Central and South America. In the United States, the AS/400 fits into almost every corporate environment and gives them a broad range of MIS compatibility. South of the American border it is a different story. In order to compete and win in new arenas, Leadtec needed to produce a version of Satellite Plus™

that would run on a UNIX-based PC platform. First they determined which programming language would be the basis of the revamped Satellite Plus™. According to Leadtec Product Manager Lee Allen, they "evaluated and dabbled with CASE tools and 4GLs to renovate our product and extend its life. "Ultimately we came

LEADTEC SYSTEMS, Inc.

Southern California, USA

Industry:

Apparel Manufacturing Support.

Legacy System:

IBM AS400 - COBOL/400

Application:

Apparel personnel management.

Target Environments:

UNIX and PC's.

Target COBOL:

Acucobol-GT

back to COBOL. It's what our staff knows: it's portable across all the platforms we are interested in: it will be around and supported for many years to come." Next, Allen contacted Unicon Conversion Technologies, Inc., of Mission Viejo, CA, to aid in their jump from AS/400 to PC's and UNIX. After assessing the available COBOL's, Leadtec selected Acucobol, Inc., of San Diego, CA, supplier of ACUCOBOL-GT, a graphical ANSI-85 compliant COBOL compiler that supports over 600 different hardware and operating system platforms. ACUCOBOL-GT's portability was critical, because the migration would allow Leadtec to run their 500,000 lines of COBOL on UNIX.

Tackling the Task

Says Allen about Unicon's work, "they did a fantastic job for us in a very short period of time. It was an effort that probably would have required over two man-years if we did it ourselves, but that would have been impossible, because we simply don't have the available staff. Using their services was extremely cost-effective and

utterly successful." When the migration was finished, Unicon handed Leadtec a version of Satellite Plus™ that was ready to run on most UNIX platforms, yet it still, as Entezari says "looks like AS/400" giving Leadtec a consistent product look. According to Allen, the process went "very smoothly." His sentiments are echoed by Entezari. Leadtec's satisfaction level with Acucobol has been "very high" and Allen, himself not a COBOL developer, has been quite impressed with Acucobol's Technical Support staff. He has found them to be both "patient and helpful" and is delighted with their assistance. Allen also cites ACUCOBOL-GT's flexibility, and notes that he "likes the fact that we can freely move between LINUX and SCO" without needing to recompile. Also appreciated is the speed of the ACUCOBOL-GT runtime when the new product, Satellite Plus™ PC, is operating. In fact, says Allen "we are planning to convert portions of our product that are written in other languages to COBOL."

Finishing Touches

By giving itself the ability to compete in the markets of Central and South America, Leadtec has demonstrated both resourcefulness and foresight. As part of Leadtec's future, ACUCOBOL-GT will enable Satellite Plus™ PC to add a GUI front end, and the COBOL's portability will also facilitate ports to RS6000, Hewlett-Packard, and Windows NT platforms when Leadtec is ready.

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For more information on Unicon's AS400 migration solution, please call

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