

SUCCESS STORY

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Chaney Systems Employs activePDF Toolkit to Improve a Client’s Bottom Line by Reducing Per-user Software Costs and Improving Maintainability

Company: Chaney Systems, Inc.

Industry: IT Consulting

Product(s) Used: activePDF Toolkit

Company Overview

Since its inception in 1984, Chaney Systems, Inc. has earned a reputation as offering some of the most comprehensive and flexible IT consulting services available. By employing only highly experienced and talented professionals, Chaney strives to help clients meet their objectives quickly and at minimal cost. Chaney’s wide range of services includes offerings such as web design and hosting, application design, network optimization, and system security audits.

Business Challenge

In 2000, Chaney was approached by Trans World Data with a request to design an application to streamline the process of printing car window stickers for auto dealerships. Using a combination of Crystal Reports® and Visual Basic®, Chaney developers built a client-side application dubbed Vehicle Details. Installed on each dealer’s computer, the new software enabled users to enter basic information about the vehicle offered for sale, such as price, VIN number, and Kelley Blue Book value. Once the required data had been gathered, Vehicle Details employed Crystal Reports to format this data for printing on Trans World Data’s custom sticker sheets. The result was a professional-looking sticker that could be placed on the car’s window, displaying information pertinent to prospective buyers.

Vehicle Details quickly became popular with dealerships across the country and Chaney continued working to improve the application to meet changing dealer demands. As the installed base grew, so did the costs for purchasing Crystal Reports which reduced the Vehicle Details’ per-license profit margin. In 2008,

the two companies determined that the application would need to be redesigned in order to prevent a drastic increase in the price of Vehicle Details. Chaney's development team set to work designing an entirely web-based solution that would not only serve to reduce costs, but also increase the product's versatility and ease of use. To that end, one of the strictest requirements was to avoid changing the user experience, to prevent confusion among existing customers. "It was important not to change the process," stated Scott Lovy, Development Manager for Chaney Systems, "the goal was to create something that was seamless to what [the customers] were currently using within the VB application." It was determined that the system should output the stickers in a universal format, further freeing the development team from platform idiosyncrasies by enabling viewing and printing from virtually any machine. The Chaney team selected PDF as the format of choice, due to its capacity for high-fidelity printing and the ubiquity of PDF viewers. Developing a PDF generation engine from the ground-up was both time and cost-prohibitive, so the Chaney team set to work finding a 3rd party solution that could be easily integrated within the architecture of the new online system.

activePDF Solution

Leveraging extensive experience from past consulting projects, the team quickly ran through their combined list of PDF generating tools previously employed, most of which fell short of the requirements for this project. "Data feeds and positioning [were] not supported at the level we needed," Lovy recalls, citing some of the limitations discovered, also noting that many had "costly licenses and processing overhead." Having used activePDF Toolkit for the past ten years, Lovy quickly realized that it was the ideal solution. "[Toolkit enabled] precise text and image positioning within a PDF page" says Lovy, describing robust features as a deciding factor, adding "[Toolkit] allowed us to do some unique data feeds into pre-programmed PDF templates." In addition to enabling the creation of pixel-perfect output, Toolkit's server-side licensing provided Trans World Data with the features they needed at a fraction of the cost of the previous solution.

After purchasing the software, the team at Chaney created a series of PDF templates to replicate the existing window sticker sheets, using PDF form fields to control the formatting of user entries and other dynamic data. Toolkit's programmable COM object made it simple to integrate into the new ASP.NET 2.0 application, enabling the solution to be up and running within a few method calls. With the new solution, dealers log into the Trans World website via a standard web browser. Once logged in, they simply enter the relevant vehicle information, choose the desired sticker layout and select the print option. Toolkit is then used to populate the PDF template, instantly displaying the final PDF in the user's browser, where it can be reviewed and printed using Trans World sticker sheets. All processing, as well as software maintenance and upgrades, is now handled entirely on the Vehicle Details server, rather than the client's system, allowing for hassle-free use.

Results

Trans World Data is exceedingly pleased with the resultant solution. Per user licensing fees have been eliminated, as well as the costs incurred by creating and distributing CDs for each software update, enabling the company to continue offering the product without increasing the cost to customers. The transition to a web-based application has also enabled Chaney Systems to easily add new features to Vehicle Details, such as the submission of car information to over 30 online sales listing services.

Encouraged by the feedback from Trans World Data and other client successes, including an online insurance claims generator as well as a worldwide solution for remote collection and reporting of pacemaker data, the Chaney team plans to continue using Toolkit in solutions for other clients. "activePDF Toolkit gives us the custom flexibility that we need and goes beyond other comparable [products] for the price," says Lovy, "We have stretched the tool's functions beyond what they may have been intended for and they have performed perfectly."