

CASE STUDY Abell Pest Control

THE CLIENT

A true Canadian business success story, Earl Abell founded [Abell Pest Control](#) in 1924. With headquarters in Toronto and branches across the country, Abell is the largest Canadian-owned pest management company in the nation and also operates branches in New York and Michigan. The company prides itself on being a leader in Integrated Pest Management, which is a proactive, preventative approach to pest management. Instead of waiting for pests to arrive, Abell focuses on effective prevention using methods and materials that are well within strict government regulations.

On the commercial side of their business, they service restaurants, retail stores, office buildings, schools, manufacturing facilities, warehouses, banks, food processing companies, hotels, grocery stores and hospitals, among other industries. Residential customers make up about 20% of their customer base.

THE CHALLENGE

In the summer of 2002, Rob McAnally, VP of IT at Abell Pest Control, realized that the company would need to replace their aging software and hardware platform. Not only was the hardware, a DEC Alpha machine, starting to behave unreliably, but it was also proving difficult to get support for the operating system and development platform (Powerhouse) that had been in place since the late eighties. In addition, the business was changing faster than the legacy platform could support. Abell needed a solution that would scale more readily to their business.

Adding to the list of IT concerns, Abell did not want to purchase an off-the-shelf solution in the belief that this would mean significant compromises in fulfilling their very particular business requirements.

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One particularly thorny challenge was represented by the fact that the old system used individual databases distributed throughout the country at each of the branches. Each database was synchronized nightly with the central database at headquarters using a proprietary file exchange mechanism. Since it would be impossible to go live with all branches at once on the replacement system, there was a hard requirement to support this mechanism during the transition to the new application.

Finally, whatever system was built would need to be supportable by internal staff. If an outside party such as KMP Designs were to build it, knowledge transfer to Abell development and support staff would also be necessary.

THE SOLUTION

In nine months KMP helped Abell to build a Windows desktop application that replaced the standalone application running at each of the branches and the application running at head office. All of the branch databases were centralized into a SQL Server 2000 database housed at headquarters. The application itself was deployed on a Citrix server at head office and run via Citrix’s thin client technology at each branch. The centralization was invisible to the branch users since for the most part; they could only access their own segment of the database.

Head office was first to switch to the new system. All of transactions went directly into the SQL Server database, which in turn was synchronized with the legacy Powerhouse database running on an ancient DEC Alpha machine.

The branches continued to synchronize just as they always had with the central Powerhouse database. KMP built synchronization technology that mirrored the old system so that as each branch went live on the new application, there was no disruption during the transition. All branches were trained on the new system and cutover over a period of about three months.

THE RESULTS

End users immediately enjoyed a richer user interface, greater speed, more flexible queries, dramatically less paper use and fewer errors due to improved error checking. The new solution introduced the capability to share real-time information across branches, a feature that was impossible with the old technology and one that provided a significant productivity boost in several areas.

Support personnel enjoy the centralization of the application and the database, enabling them to better support users by “shadowing” their application sessions. This allows support techs to see exactly what the users are doing and seeing. Upgraded database technology also now guarantees that, unlike the legacy system, no transaction will ever be half completed.

Developers enjoy the ability to deploy the application countrywide in under five minutes. The KMP business object framework makes changes and the incorporation of new business logic easier to handle than ever before.

Management likes the flexible reporting framework based on Crystal Reports as well as the unlimited real time escalation capabilities that can warn them of virtually any situation. They are impressed with how quickly the system can now adapt to change.

