



Overview

Country or Region: Canada
Industry: Professional Services

Customer Profile

Founded in 1971, London, Ontario-based College Pro Painters operates through seasonal franchises run by college students. With annual revenues of CDN \$36.5 million (U.S.\$30 million), it is one of the largest exterior residential painting companies in North America.

Business Situation

In an ongoing effort to become more cost effective and to improve customer service and efficiency, College Pro needed a better way to make its database records more accurate. Traditional solutions were not suitable.

Solution

College Pro turned to Envision IT's StreetPerfect.net Web service. Using Microsoft® Visual Studio® .NET 2002, Envision was able to quickly and easily integrate the product into College Pro's system.

Benefits

- More accurate customer records
- Increased productivity
- Improved operational efficiencies
- Simple, fast application development

College Pro Painters Improves Efficiency While Decreasing Costs

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Peter Carson, President, Envision IT

As part of its ongoing effort to improve customer service, residential painting company College Pro Painters was looking for a better way to make sure its database records were accurate and consistent. With data entry done not only by the call center staff, but by North American franchisees over the Web, traditional client/server solutions were not suitable. Knowing that customer addresses were a big part of the data's problem, College Pro decided to go with Microsoft® Gold Certified Partner Envision IT's StreetPerfect.net Web service. Using Microsoft Visual Studio® .NET 2002, Envision was able to quickly and easily integrate the product into College Pro's system. College Pro was able to reduce costs and improve efficiency and customer service as a result of more accurate records through StreetPerfect.net.



Situation

Seconds shaved off of individual customer service telephone calls can translate into savings of thousands of dollars a year for a call center, driving the ongoing pursuit to find ways to streamline the process. Speed, however, isn't the only factor to success in the call center business.

Accuracy is even more important when the volume of calls is large, especially in a call center that fields an average of 1,000 calls each week. This is the case with College Pro Painters, where having accurate data records is key to the efficiency and success of its call center. College Pro's main call center, based in London, Ontario, receives as many as 750 calls per day—3,750 calls weekly—in its peak season from both existing and potential customers.

For each customer, there is a data record that holds key information—including name, address, and telephone numbers—which is provided by the customer. This information is often given incorrectly, which can turn into a major problem for the accounting, marketing, and sales departments with returned mail, unpaid invoices, and missed sales opportunities.

As a result, inaccurate data records must be fixed at the customer service representative's expense, wasting time and creating frustration. Given the high volume of calls coming into the call center, these inaccuracies present a bottleneck in operations.

"When people call, the first two pieces of information that we ask people for are their postal code and phone number. This lets us know where they are, so we can have the appropriate franchise contact them," says Laurie Coolman, Operations Manager of TLS, a sister company of College Pro which provides customer relationship management

through the call center. "The problem arises when the wrong customer information is entered. The time spent fixing these errors afterwards is not an efficient or cost-effective process for a busy call center like ours."

College Pro called on Envision IT, a Microsoft® Gold Certified Partner that helps customers gain competitive edge by delivering customized business solutions using the Web and the Microsoft Windows® operating system. Envision IT recognized College Pro's problem immediately. From talking to its clients, Envision knew that inaccurate data records in call centers are a common problem.

"When we ask clients and potential customers how accurate their data is, the best percentage we have heard is 95 percent accuracy. That's not such a big issue unless you're like most call centers that have hundreds of thousands or millions of data records. Even at a five percent inaccuracy rate, that means that thousands of records need to be corrected," says Peter Carson, President of Envision IT.

There are consumer sites that offer help with address searching and verification, according to Carson, but they are not robust enough for a call center's needs. "It's just not time efficient for a customer service representative to get out of the College Pro system, go into a browser to look up the address, and then get back into the system," he says. "Although some vendors do offer solutions that could be integrated directly, their licensing models are cost-prohibitive for many applications. For example, it doesn't work where there tends to be a high number of users but lower volumes of transactions per user. Problems with installation and maintenance of client and server solutions that do this are also an issue. With our Web service, however, there is no infrastructure or maintenance required."

Solution

Envision IT realized that a Web service would be the ideal technology to solve College Pro's problem and, as a result, developed StreetPerfect.net. Based on Sun Media Corporation's StreetPerfect software toolkit and using the Microsoft Visual Studio® .NET 2002 development system, Envision IT developed StreetPerfect.net, a Web service that provides address authentication for addresses anywhere in the United States and Canada.

With StreetPerfect.net, all the customer service representative has to do is ask customers for their address and postal code. The representative enters the information, and it automatically populates the correct street name, city, and province.

"StreetPerfect.net is a major time saver for us because it significantly reduces the opportunity for errors that our representatives would have to go back later and correct," says Coolman.

To build StreetPerfect.net, Envision used Visual Studio .NET 2002. The company's developers found it to be much easier to work with than any other tool. "We could have built this with another development tool, but it would have required a lot of different toolkits and a lot of magic to get it done. It was head and shoulders easier thanks to [Microsoft] .NET connection software," says Carson.

By turning a client server application into a Web service and marketing it with a transactional model, it opened up a broad market for Envision IT and offered customers like College Pro a cost-effective solution.

Benefits

As a result of implementing StreetPerfect.net, College Pro was able to improve operational efficiency and productivity since customer service representatives no longer had

to spend time fixing inaccurate customer records. And by employing a Web service, College Pro also reduced potential costs of new infrastructure.

Fast and Easy Development

The power and flexibility built into Visual Studio .NET 2002 enabled Envision IT developers to quickly and easily build StreetPerfect.net.

"Visual Studio .NET [2002] is designed to build Web services right out of the box. All the functionality we needed is built-in. We didn't have to get third-party tools or add-on toolkits to make it all work," says Carson. "There was less code to write and much less guesswork to fit it all together. That helped us get the solution into the market much faster."

In addition to increased speed in the development process, Visual Studio .NET 2002 also made it easier for other developers to build applications to use the new Web service. According to Carson, with Visual Studio .NET 2002, the developers could easily build any type of application from traditional applications using Windows to a Microsoft ASP.NET Web-based application—without any major hassles.

"All we had to do is go to the Web references section of Visual Studio .NET [2002] and say we wanted to add a Web reference. We typed in the URL, and it intelligently went on the Internet, discovered everything about that Web service, and delivered it back to us. Again, that saves a great deal of time and improves our productivity," Carson adds.

Cost Savings

Using the Web service StreetPerfect.net instead of a proprietary solution that would be deployed into College Pro's infrastructure provided College Pro with an affordable solution that meets the company's objective

to become more financially and operationally efficient.

"The traditional model for this kind of application is to buy user licenses. In College Pro's case, they've got a thousand people using the system and at \$100 per user license, that's a major expense. However, the volume of transactions per user is low, so the cost for each transaction would be high," says Carson. "Using a Web service is much more cost effective since it is transaction-based. College Pro only pays for actual transactions."

In addition, College Pro saved the potential expense of having to invest in new infrastructure. "For a comparable solution, it's often a major investment to develop a proprietary system that would work with an existing infrastructure," says Carson. "That's why a Web service works so well in this situation because it doesn't require implementing any new infrastructure. The value of StreetPerfect.net is that it integrates right into your own application."

Increased Operational Efficiency

By improving the accuracy of each data record, College Pro saves time and cuts costs by eliminating potential errors which customer service representatives would have to go back and fix.

"StreetPerfect.net is truly useful from the data entry point of view. By putting accurate customer information into the database the first time, it saves the next agent or franchisee from having to go in and correct it. That is a significant benefit in a busy call center," says Coolman.

For More Information

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For more information about Envision IT products and services, call 905-812-3009 or visit the Web site at: www.envisionit.com

For more information about College Pro Painters products and services, call 1-800-465-2839 or visit the Web site at: www.collegepro.com

Microsoft .NET Framework

The Microsoft .NET Framework is an integral Windows component for building and running the next generation of applications and XML Web services.

For more information on the .NET Framework, go to: msdn.microsoft.com/netframework

Microsoft Visual Studio .NET

Microsoft Visual Studio .NET is the rapid application development (RAD) tool for building next-generation Web applications and XML Web services. Visual Studio .NET empowers developers to rapidly design broad-reach Web applications for any device and any platform. In addition, Visual Studio .NET is fully integrated with the Microsoft .NET Framework, providing support for multiple programming languages and automatically handling many common programming tasks, freeing developers to rapidly create Web applications using their language of choice.

For more information on Visual Studio .NET, go to: msdn.microsoft.com/vstudio

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