

## MBS Textbook Exchange Accelerates into E-Business with LegaSuite GUI®



Controlling 35 percent of their industry's market share, MBS Textbook Exchange offers various applications to bookstores for inventory, accounting, EDI, Web

Commerce, IBM point-of-sale systems (utilizing the IBM POS line), Student Financial Aid, plus institutional host application interfaces to link bookstores strategically to campus host solutions.

### Challenge

In the bookstore industry, vendors vary significantly - from huge chains that take advantage of the latest technology trends to promote and sell their products to small mom-and-pop shops that are operating the same way they have for many years. The same is true of university and college bookstores - they're all on a different coordinate of the technology curve.

MBS Textbook Exchange and the MBS Systems Division is the largest software provider for college and university bookstores in the United States. Serving approximately 1000 schools, MBS wanted to make their iSeries-based application suite more intuitive and more cost-effective for smaller, less technology-savvy schools by deploying an Application Service Provider (ASP) model.

The company also wanted to reduce training time and decrease their 90,000 customer support calls they received annually by creating a Web application that would offer easy access to support documentation. "In the industry there are a lot of smaller stores and colleges. We wanted to develop a model that was very simple for them to use, that didn't require any major capital investment in hardware, and where we could administer the solutions for them. And we wanted to do it all by taking advantage of our existing legacy solutions," said David Henderson, vice president for MBS Systems.

### Solution

By using Seagull Software's LegaSuite GUI solution, MBS was able to GUI-enhance and Web-enable their applications, while still leveraging their investment in existing legacy technology. LegaSuite GUI, a component of LegaSuite®, provides industry-leading developer tools and infrastructure for Web-to-host and Windows-to-host access to iSeries applications. LegaSuite GUI empowers organizations to deploy iSeries applications to HTML, Java and Windows environments in a single work effort.

With LegaSuite GUI, MBS transformed 5,000 green screens from 15 application modules into an intuitive GUI in just over three months. From there, they were able to deploy their new GUI as a thin client solution called TAonline to support a growing ASP business. Now, MBS's client bookstores can order textbooks through the Web. "We are still using the same green-screen application, but we've given it a whole new look and feel. Because we can offer an ASP model, we provide functionality that's easier and less expensive to use. We are the only company in the marketplace with an ASP solution. Everyone else is forcing customers to buy their software as a suite and make investments in hardware. With LegaSuite GUI, we don't have to do that," said Henderson.



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MBS launched TAonline in September of 2002 and already has over 200 customers now utilizing the application, with a forecast of over 500 customers by the end of their fiscal year (August 2003). "This has been a revolutionary product for the industry - introducing state-of-the-art technology to bookstores that have not been able to take advantage of automated solutions due to the expense of purchasing and maintaining their own servers. We have dramatically increased our market share in a stagnant market. LegaSuite GUI and the ASP model have been instrumental in our success," said Henderson.

"Seagull Software's speed of development, ease of use and short training periods were all crucial factors in the decision-making process," Smyth said. "The beauty of the whole installation process was its non-invasive nature, so it didn't affect the underlying host application." Under the supervision of Seagull Software consultants, the LBE's IT Application Support Team implemented a Java client version of the original applications within the main council departments, resulting in browser access to these existing business processes. "The development process was extremely quick. The only problems we had to overcome were the internal arguments of what color the GUI screen would be and what the fonts and buttons were going to look like," Smyth said.

To reduce training times and support calls, MBS used LegaSuite GUI's scripting capabilities to build buttons into the new graphical panels that link to help screens. By clicking on the buttons, panels that contain functionality and instructional information pop up on the screen. "We have 900 screens in the application, and we've created help screens for 800 of them. It has given our clients immediate access to helpful hints and advice," commented Henderson.

Other help buttons link users to online documentation and training exercises. "Using WebEx, we recorded presentations for each of the various menus. While users are still in the application, they can click on the training button, which opens recorded WebEx presentations that explain the functionality associated with each menu. Our customers love it," said Henderson.

### Results

As a result of incorporating LegaSuite GUI technology into their application, MBS has yielded important benefits. The intuitive interface and help options have reduced the learning curve and kept support calls to a minimum. "We have grown our business and added a significant number of new accounts within the last four years. However, the number of customer support calls has not gone up," commented Henderson. "Before we had a graphical interface, there was an exponential increase in calls based on new accounts. We haven't had to add staff to support our growth, which has helped us save money." Overall, MBS has benefited from its relationship with Seagull Software. "Seagull Software was great. The support is good and the technology is proven. And they helped us bring our solution's new technology to market in a timely matter," said Henderson.

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