



Overview

The need

A trailer manufacturer wanted to modernize its text-based interface for its Informix applications with a modern, attractive GUI to improve worker ergonomics and handle business growth.

The solution

IBM Business Partner Adaptris helped Böckmann build a better interface while keeping its existing business logic by migrating its Informix 4GL applications to Genero.

The benefit

20 percent decrease in errors and
20 percent increase in productivity;
Saved the cost of replacing custom
applications with standard software;
Two-week migration of 4GL applications
to Genero, saving consulting fees

Böckmann Fahrzeugwerke

Achieves 20 percent increase in productivity working with Adaptris and using Informix Genero

Acceptance of the user interface is important in data-entry operations, online transactional processing and other processes that require continuous repetitive computer work. Working with a graphical user interface (GUI) is much less tedious and more pleasing to the eye than a text-based user interface (TUI).

“Working with the old-fashioned screens is stressful and less productive,” says Uwe Holtkamp, Managing Director of Adaptris Deutschland GmbH (Adaptris) in Bremen, Germany. “You can get from point A to point B in an old car, but wouldn’t you rather drive a new Mercedes?”

IBM Business Partner Adaptris has been working with IBM® Informix® clients for more than 20 years, performing integration, development, support, and lately helping them migrate their Informix 4GL code-based applications to Informix Genero.

Extending the value of Informix investments

Adaptris’ clients are taking this step in order to convert their applications to a GUI for better worker ergonomics and competitive positioning, state-of-the-art design and powerful new features, such as list boxes, images and other widgets.

Founded in 2004, Adaptris Deutschland is part of the worldwide Adaptris organization. The team in Germany has been working with Informix since 1991, and they have a lot of respect for their clients’ loyalty to Informix. “Informix for our customers means good value for



“We’ve had only positive experiences with Genero. Functionalities which were missing at the beginning were added in a timely fashion. Genero is a dynamic product that is going to be developed further in the right direction, just as we users require.”

—Ulrike Ottersen, Manager of Software
Development, Böckmann Fahrzeugwerke
GmbH

the money, high stability, security and performance,” says Uwe Pottberg, managing director, Adaptris Deutschland. “The ability to transform 4GL applications to Genero is literally allowing Informix users to see the database in a whole new way, benefit from their internal skill sets and extend their investment further.”

The acceptance of Microsoft Windows is widespread, and most of Adaptris’ Genero clients choose to work with Windows. Users can put more information in a graphical window and present it more clearly than on a text screen. “We have seen so many overloaded screens which were nice looking after conversion to Windows,” says Holtkamp.

Support for Windows and Windows-based programs

“A migration from 4GL to Genero can be done almost without modifications to the source code, and the result is quick,” he continues. “But to use the full Windows features of Genero, you have to make changes to the source code. This is a step-by-step process that also brings timely results.”

“Genero supports many new options, such as using Windows-based programs, handling local and remote files and directories, easy handling of XML files, more comfortable and extended array handling, including window tables, string handling, drag and drop, and Java support,” says Pottberg.

A manufacturer with horses and Informix at its heart

One of Adaptris’ clients is Böckmann Fahrzeugwerke GmbH (Böckmann), a manufacturer of horse trailers and general purpose trailers. At the top of its product line, Böckmann manufactures lavishly outfitted horse vans with traveling space for up to nine horses,

Solution components:

Software

- IBM® Informix® 11.5
 - IBM Informix Genero
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Deutschland GmbH

a sleeping compartment for the humans and a tack room. The company, based in Lastrup in Lower Saxony, turns out approximately 13,000 general purpose trailers and 5,500 horse trailers annually, with sales of 50 - 60 million EUR.

Horses are at the heart of the Böckmann family of four brothers. Stallion stables founded by the father have become one of the most successful stud farms in Germany. The company got its start as a farrier and repairer of agricultural machinery. Early on, the company also made horse-drawn carriages.

That tradition is alive today in the quality of products the company brings to market. Every detail of the Böckmann business runs on IBM Informix databases. The company has 86 users of its ERP system, which is based on Informix and was developed in 4GL. Accounting systems also use Informix, as do subsidiaries that access the ERP system, such as the vehicle registration office. The company has 287 reporting programs that perform analyses, which were written in 4GL and are part of the ERP system.

Saving its existing applications

Böckmann has been using Informix since 1996. It deliberated once about changing the database and evaluated Microsoft SQL Server and Oracle, but threw out the idea. “Oracle is oversized, and SQL Server was too slow and didn’t seem secure,” says Andreas Schröder, manager of controlling/IT, Böckmann. “Informix is fast, stable and secure, has a good price-performance profile. We’ve had a good relationship with Adaptris over the years. And, of course, another reason for staying with Informix was 4GL, which enabled us to develop so many applications that have served us so well.”

Böckmann has considered giving up its customized software and moving to standardized applications, but it has always decided to stay with its own software which handles business effectively. However, management and staff agreed that the old-fashioned text screens had to go. “We wanted a modern interface with simpler handling and faster training of staff,” says Schröder. The growing company needed to add administrative staff, but training with the existing interface was complex and time-consuming.

Böckmann decided to upgrade its 4GL applications to Genero after seeing the positive results that could easily be achieved with the product. “For us, Genero seemed to be the best product on the market, and that still is true,” says Ulrike Otersen, manager of software development, Böckmann. “Genero saved us from having to redevelop all our applications, which we would have been forced to do with a Java or .NET solution. But we wouldn’t have gone that route. We would have moved to standard software and abandoned applications which are valuable and run very efficiently.”

“Adaptris did the basic changeover, which included deleting frame characters, adding new GUI frames and GUI tables, in just two weeks, enabling us to avoid further consulting fees,” Schröder adds. “The final stage with the printing applications, migrating the scripts from UNIX to Linux and implementing all the new features took two-to-three months. We got very helpful support from Adaptris. The timeframe absolutely met our expectations.”

Continuous development of new features

Altogether, Böckmann migrated 242 programs, 1,522 modules, 596 screens and 574,684 lines of code. “The users were enthusiastically happy with the new interface,” says Schröder. “They were eager to use copy and paste and all the GUI advantages that weren’t possible previously.”

With its new intuitive and easy-to-use interface, Böckmann has been able to expand its administrative staff to handle the significant growth it has experienced in the past few years. “We have saved money indirectly by keeping the same applications and develop new functionalities for our expanded administrative staff, who are really the reason we have been able to grow so fast,” says Schröder. “Also, employees are more accurate with the new interface. We’ve seen the number of errors decline by about 20 percent which means productivity has improved by 20 percent.”

“We’ve had only positive experiences with Genero,” says Otersen. “Functionalities which were missing at the beginning were added in a timely fashion. Now there are many new features for development such as XML, files, directories, parallel running programs, faster creation and change of screens, all the things which make the development of programs much easier. Genero is a dynamic product that is going to be developed further in the right direction, just as we users require.”

For more information

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