

Successful IT modernization through symbiosis



photo: Consist

Corporate groups can benefit from midsize companies

By Isabel Braun

There are a number of advantages for corporate groups in relying on midsize companies when looking for a suitable IT service provider. They score big with greater flexibility, backed up by competence and reliability. We'll show you the example of a migration project supported by Consist at a large financial service provider. In shipping, for example, tugboats are ordered for special tasks such as piloting into a lock. Companies at the scale of corporate groups are set up for the "long haul". So quick scouting in the unknown waters of software technology can be handled perfectly by midsize companies like Consist.

The characteristics that must often be met in large companies or corporate groups include the following, for example:

- Uniform formalities for systems and procedures
- Many levels of hierarchy and long approval processes
- Tight restrictions on access privileges to systems and in development processes
- Concentration of departments on singular tasks, with a tendency to "wall off" other departments

- Desire for fixed-price projects due to past experiences with high project costs
- Often a combination of a desire for collaboration with international and/or large service providers with concern about a lack of absolutely essential flexibility

We will use a migration project from Bolero to Java to make it clear just why a midsize IT service provider is exactly the right partner for a corporate group. We handled this project for a large company in the financial sector.

Starting situation and the project order

Our customer had a few important applications that had been programmed in Bolero in the 90's. Bolero is a software platform based on Java technology and introduced in 1998 by Software AG, which at the time represented an entirely new product series for Web-oriented business applications. Bolero consists of an application development environment, a compiler, and the application server that supports server-side applications. The Bolero language supports

the same basic concepts as Java, but uses a different syntax.

Since Bolero no longer fit the current corporate strategy, our client's internal guidelines mandated the complete replacement of this technology by no later than the end of 2013. Java and other technologies prescribed according to corporate strategy were to be used as the new technology. The objective of the project described here was to take four applications – an administration client used as the normal user interface, a Web application, and two specialized business applications – and convert them in such a way that the migration was undetectable to the user. 100% of the functionality had to be migrated while preserving the look and feel. Two of the applications were categorized as business-critical. Specifically, the source code of the Bolero applications had to be exported as Java classes, the dialogs converted to Swing and Java 1.6 and the portal to Spring MVC, and all Bolero dependencies entirely removed.

The project had to be completed as efficiently and cost-effectively as possible within six months, ideally in the form of a fixed-price project.

Among other things, good previous experience with Consist led the financial service provider to place this migration with our company. Since Consist had developed and continued the development of the Bolero applications over a long period of time and therefore knew the applications well, while simultaneously being familiar with the large company's structures, this collaboration seemed

pretty much clear. As a midsize IT service provider, Consist was able to orient itself entirely to the client and their needs.

Challenges

- **Technical specifics:** For outsiders, the screens of the banking software were not intuitive in their use.
- **Technology:** The source code was autogenerated from Bolero to Java. Due to its partly rudimentary structure, it was unsurprisingly impossible to interpret it directly. The newly generated source code also still had dependencies on Bolero libraries that had to be removed.
- **Processes / decision paths:** As is often the case in corporate groups, it took a certain amount of time for the Java experts at Consist to obtain the access privileges they needed to the systems relevant to the migration and to the development data. To be able to complete the project on schedule, however, a fast start was essential.

Solution: A combination of flexibility and know-how

The Consist specialists started by setting up their own development environment so they could start the migration early. They were successful in learning the client-specific environment quickly and understanding the application in detail.

The Java experts also developed a customized procedure tailored to the

specific client's situation, a type of model with a standardized approach to the implementation of dialogs and functions. This allowed screens to be ported to Java relatively quickly over the course of the project. Jira was selected as a bug tracking system. Primarily the user interfaces and their functionality were adapted, and a few dependent classes (libraries) were removed and replaced with Java.

The Consist team was able to leave the core of the application alone in three of the four applications, since it was not affected by Bolero. However, in the Web portal the core also had to be changed, since here the Bolero Web solution was in use. It was replaced by the Spring MVC framework, in other words, it was brought to the latest state of the art.

Implemented on schedule

Thanks to their great flexibility, profound Java know-how, and a structural procedure specifically developed for this client, the Consist team was able to migrate all four applications to Java between June and December, 2013 – on time and within budget. The users can still work with the same look and feel. So the objectives of the project were achieved.

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