

Geac delivers flexible ERP solutions with WebSphere software platform.

Overview

■ Application

ERP and e-business solutions for small and mid-size manufacturers and distributors

■ Business Benefits

Faster software development with more flexibility; improved software quality and reduced maintenance costs; ability to extend existing solutions and integrate more easily with third-party software; enhanced ability to capture new markets.

■ Software

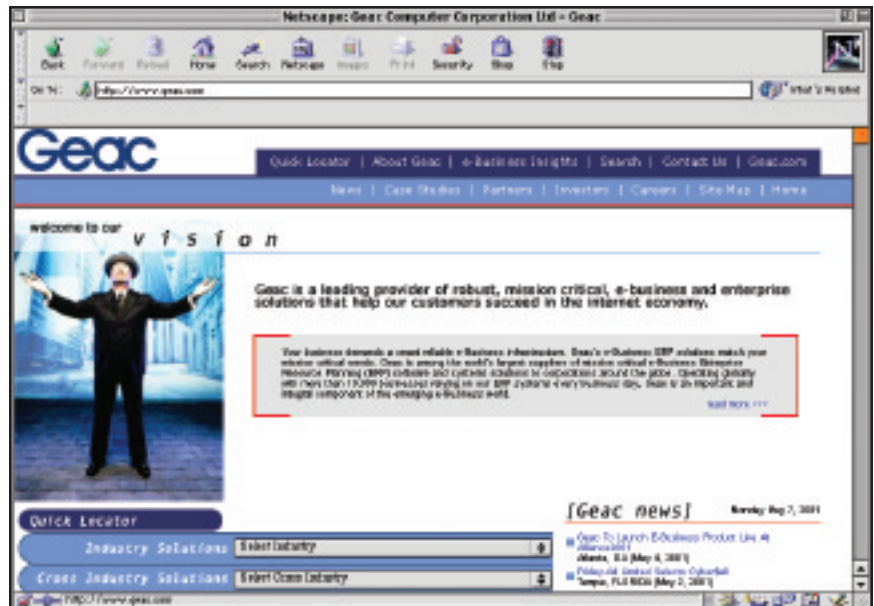
IBM WebSphere® Application Server, Advanced Edition; IBM WebSphere Commerce Suite; IBM MQSeries®; IBM DB2® Universal Database™; IBM VisualAge® for Java™; IBM DB2 Connect™

■ Server

IBM @server iSeries
IBM AS/400®

■ Services

IBM Learning Services



The popularity of enterprise resource planning (ERP) solutions continues to fuel demand for the midrange AS/400 server.

ERP software provider Geac Enterprise Solutions knows what it takes to succeed in the highly competitive middle-market sector: provide a complete and robust solution from one vendor, with the flexibility to meet customers' changing needs. This has made Geac one of the top ten ERP providers worldwide. Geac recently formed a strategic alliance with IBM to provide e-business solutions and ERP software for mid-size companies. System21 is Geac's main ERP product and runs on IBM @server iSeries and IBM AS/400 servers.

“Products belonging to the WebSphere software platform for e-business work together to create a stable infrastructure for dependable performance while supporting innovation.”

—Alastair Middleton, European Marketing Director, Geac Enterprise Solutions

e-business—redefining the competitive edge in your favor



Leveraging a 20-year partnership with IBM, Geac recently formed a strategic alliance with IBM to provide e-business services and ERP software for mid-size companies.

System21 is a leading ERP system in the automotive, food, beverage and apparel industries. These sectors today are acutely affected by the volatility of their business operating environment. Companies need to react to changes quickly with enhancements and extensions to their ERP software as they adapt to changing conditions. But the middle-market companies that are the core of Geac's customer base have a strong preference for buying an integrated solution from a single supplier. They look to Geac to build new functionality into System21 and to provide integration with third-party extensions around their ERP hub.

Geac realized it had to find a way of bringing new System21 components to market quickly, and a way to integrate easily with third-party components.

To meet these requirements, the company started work in 1998 on a new architecture for enhancing and extending System21 using component technology rather than the Report Program Generator (RPG) language used for core System21. Geac assessed the different component architectures available and settled on an Enterprise JavaBean™ (EJB™) architecture as most suitable for the mid-market. EJB technology provides an architecture which scales effectively from small systems right up to large enterprises and facilitates rapid development.

Geac's next step was to select development tools and an application server platform for the deployment of its solution. The company assessed the different suppliers of enterprise Java middleware and development tools and chose IBM WebSphere Application Server and IBM VisualAge for Java as best of breed. These software products are part of the

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*—Colin Brown, Senior Development Manager,
Geac Enterprise Solutions*

IBM WebSphere software platform for e-business—a complete, integrated set of development and deployment tools which Geac has found to offer tremendous programmer productivity.

Development work on the first product using the new architecture started in early 2000, and the first beta product was shipped 8 months later. This product is now live. With its new architecture, the System21 components can scale to up to 2,000 concurrent users. And with the open interfaces, support for industry standards and multiplatform support provided by the WebSphere software platform for e-business, Geac will be able to integrate System21 with third-party products and expand its markets to many other platforms in the future.

Development and deployment environments

The first parts of System21 to be redeveloped using the new architecture are Order Management and TeleSales. Geac chose these areas because customers demand greatest flexibility from these systems.

Geac used VisualAge for Java as the integrated development platform and WebSphere Application Server, Advanced Edition on the AS/400 server as the deployment platform for its new applications. IBM DB2 Universal Database for AS/400 provides the core data management function.

The Geac developers soon discovered that the tight integration between VisualAge for Java and WebSphere Application Server enables quick and early testing of code as it is developed. “VisualAge provides a debug and test environment for the components deployed in WebSphere Application Server, which has helped to significantly reduce our development time,” said Colin Brown, senior development manager at Geac.

“Software quality is as important to us as programmer productivity,” continues Brown. “We find that the quality of code produced using VisualAge for Java is much improved. This leads to faster test cycles and lower maintenance costs.”

Easier integration with Geac’s Active Architecture

Geac’s Active Architecture was developed in parallel to the new EJB architecture as a framework for integration between System21 and other products from Geac or from third parties. Active Architecture is one element in Geac’s Commerce Platform, which is a set of integration, workflow and event management services designed to enable customers to capitalize on their investment in the core ERP system and incrementally enhance their business systems.

Active Architecture has a message recognition, routing and management layer that links to IBM MQSeries and accepts messages in XML format to provide robust, reliable integration between applications.

One of the new generation of products integrated to System21 using Active Architecture is Geac’s e.Supply. This is a product for business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-consumer (B2C) e-commerce. Geac uses IBM WebSphere Commerce Suite—also part of the WebSphere software platform for e-business—to deliver the foundation components for e.Supply.

“Building on WebSphere Commerce Suite will enable us to provide a full-function solution to customers,” says Steve Rees, e.Supply product manager for Geac. “We have close integration with System21 already. As WebSphere Commerce Suite moves to an EJB architecture we will be able to capitalize on the close match to our EJB architecture for System21 and reuse the new business logic which is based on Java technology.”

Geac is now using Active Architecture to integrate IBM DB2 Connect for iSeries with System21 as a platform for automating B2B transactions. This will allow Geac’s customers to participate in online marketplace exchanges from Ariba and Metiom.

The IBM support factor

Geac has received strong support from IBM throughout this project to help re-engineer and extend System21. IBM Learning Services provided an education program to help Geac re-educate developers with RPG or Microsoft® Visual Basic® backgrounds to become EJB developers.

Geac was among the earliest adopters of WebSphere and EJB technology on the AS/400 platform and has worked closely with the IBM AS/400 development laboratory in Rochester, Minnesota. Together they have tested and optimized Geac's software; and Geac has helped IBM to test and optimize the implementation of WebSphere Application Server on AS/400.

"In our partnership with GEAC, my team provides direct development support to the GEAC application development team to ensure an optimized solution for System21 on iSeries," says Jim Anderson, program manager, iSeries EAS development, IBM. "In addition, we get valuable input on requirements for this new application environment based on Java and EJBs. The result is increased business value for both GEAC and IBM."

The wider benefits

Comments Alastair Middleton, European marketing director for Geac, "For many customers, the name IBM is synonymous with e-business, so our new versions of System21 and e.Supply will benefit from the strength of IBM marketing and its reputation as an e-business solutions provider."

In addition to marketing opportunities, Geac and its customers will benefit from accelerated development cycles made possible by the WebSphere software platform for e-business.

"From our point of view," says Middleton, "products belonging to the WebSphere software platform for e-business work together to create a stable infrastructure for dependable performance while supporting innovation. We will be taking advantage of it to build our business further in the future."

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