

Success Story: Infragistics Customer Solution

Annie E. Casey Foundation Leverages Visual Studio .NET and XML WebServices to Get Help to Kids Faster

When addressing the critical needs of children, time is of the essence. That's why The Annie E. Casey Foundation asked Ajilon Consulting to find a way to accelerate the processing and delivery of its cash grants. Ajilon Consulting used Microsoft Visual Studio .NET, Infragistics NetAdvantage toolset and XML Web services to create a sophisticated, single point of access connecting the Foundation's various systems. As a result, Foundation staff can work more productively both at the office and in the field, and grant-processing time has been reduced by up to 40 percent.

Situation

The Annie E. Casey Foundation takes aim at the problems of children in the U.S., supporting both the services they need and policy changes that will benefit them.



The Annie E. Casey Foundation



Created in 1948 by Jim Casey, founder of United Parcel Service, it is the nation's 18th largest charitable foundation, disbursing approximately \$180 million to approximately 1,800 organizations each year. According to the Foundation's Director of Technology and Information Management, Henry Dennig, they process about 2,300 grant requests and 6,000 checks and check requests annually. Each grant requires an average of 10 transactions, including two or three outgoing documents and two or three incoming reports. Because strict IRS regulations govern charitable foundations, each document requires substantial data collection and careful checking for compliance with appropriate rules.

Customer Profile

The Annie E. Casey Foundation, the nation's 18th largest charitable foundation, gives out \$180 million a year to help children in the U.S. A staff of 170 processes and administers more than 2,000 grants annually.

Business Situation

The Foundation wanted to speed up its grant-making process, but its existing gift management program was proprietary and could not be updated or modified.

Solution

Ajilon Consulting used Microsoft® Visual Studio® .NET, Infragistics NetAdvantage toolset and Web services to create a single point of access to the information Foundation administrators need to move grants along - even if they're traveling in the field.

Benefits

- Streamlined grant processing time by up to 40%.
- Dramatically reduced development time.
- Web services established easy integration between disparate systems.

To manage this process, the Casey Foundation uses a gift management program from a third-party vendor, which they access through a custom client-server application called RIF (Request Initiation Form).

These programs were functioning adequately, but The Annie E. Casey Foundation managers were eager to speed up the delivery of their cash grants. When the ultimate beneficiaries are disadvantaged children who need help to stay in school or stay out of jail, everyone concerned wants to make things work faster and more efficiently.

Casey administrators were slowed down by the fact that the gift management and RIF programs did not match the actual work processes they used; yet it was difficult or impossible to make changes. There was no way to customize the grant making application to contain the information collected from grantees and no way for administrators traveling in the field to access the information remotely.

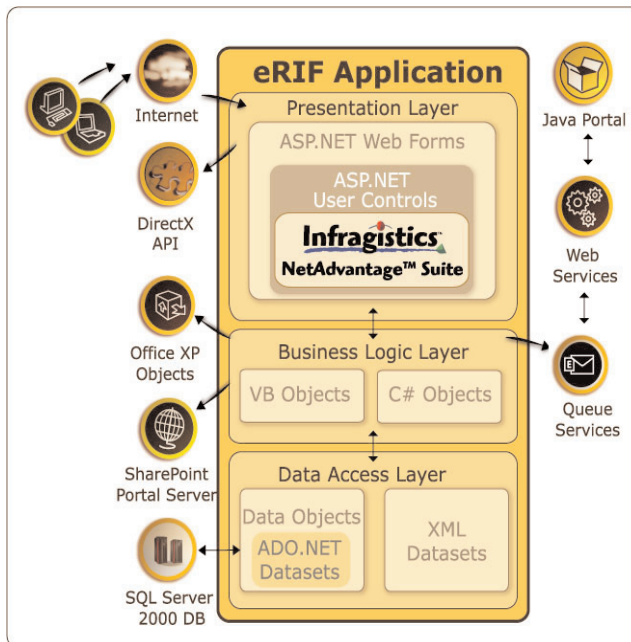
Solution

When Dennig knew he needed to upgrade the Foundation's grant processing system, he turned to the consultants who built the original RIF program, Ajilon Consulting, an international IT services firm. Ajilon Consulting is a Microsoft® Gold Certified Solution Provider, and consultant and lead architect Jim Lane has been working with the Microsoft .NET Framework since its early beta days.

Lane set about developing an application to streamline the processing of a grant through the existing gift management program, from initial request through approval. The solution, called eRIF, uses Microsoft ASP.NET architecture built on the Microsoft .NET Framework, with a Microsoft SQL Server™ 2000 database on the back end. The Casey Foundation uses three servers to operate the solution: one running its main Web site, another running a Microsoft SharePoint™ Web document storage system, and a third running the Web services and COM+ (an object-oriented programming architecture) components.

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Jim Lane, Consultant,
Ajilon Consulting



Annie E. Casey's eRIF platform

Accelerated Development

With 70,000 lines of code, including Microsoft Visual Basic® .NET, C#, HTML, XML and T/SQL, eRIF is the biggest single application Lane has ever written - and yet he finished it in a fast five months. This is in large part because he was able to build the presentation layer with Microsoft Visual Studio® .NET and the Infragistics NetAdvantage toolset, rather than using custom-built JavaScript.

"The Casey staff wanted to preserve a rich user interface similar to what they had on their desktop," he explains. "It would have taken a full time JavaScript programmer a month or two to create such an interface, but I was able to do it in just a few days with Visual Studio .NET and the NetAdvantage toolset."

Lane likes the Infragistics NetAdvantage toolset for two reasons: it seamlessly integrates with the Visual Studio .NET integrated development environment (IDE); and it's written from the ground up in C# for the Microsoft .NET Framework. "While other control suites often behave like black boxes, the Infragistics toolset is completely object-oriented, so I can use their controls as is, or I can inherit from them and extend their functionality if I need to," he says.

"When I go into my toolbox, I immediately see all the controls and I can select which ones I want to use," he adds. Many of the features that Lane wanted to create were used on several different pages. "It was a big time saver for me to be able to combine Infragistics controls and ASP.NET user controls and create a generic control of my

own that could be inherited on different pages. All the code and business logic was already there," he says. "That saved me a lot of time and coding compared to the classic ASP approach of cutting and pasting the same code between multiple pages."

Easy Integration with a Custom Portal

The Casey Foundation also wanted to integrate its grant management application with a Java-based portal that provides staff with message and calendar services. That might have been another time-consuming project in itself, Lane says, but he was able to use Web services to quickly connect the two applications, rather than create a new interface. "I was able to talk to the people who built the portal," says Lane, "and we came to a quick agreement on using SOAP, as well as what we'd need to send back and forth and what the communication would look like."

Lane used Microsoft® Message Queuing (MSMQ) to help communicate with the portal. When a new entry is created in the message queue, it automatically creates a call to the Web service, which sends the desired message to the Java portal. The SOAP packet is usually quite small but the description fields included in the message can vary considerably, so the packet sizes can be anywhere from 5K to 25K.

Benefits

By connecting multiple systems through a single point of access, the eRIF solution has significantly increased productivity for Annie E. Casey Foundation staff:

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Jim Lane, Consultant,
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Software (Infragistics)

NetAdvantage Toolset

Software (Microsoft)

Microsoft® Windows®
Microsoft Office
Microsoft SQL Server™
Microsoft Visual Studio® .NET

- Because eRIF is built on Microsoft SQL Server 2000, administrators can now access pertinent financial reports directly from the grant management tool. "That's a big bonus for them, to be able to see those reports online, not having to open another application," says Lane. He was able to provide this connectivity because a new financial management program Casey had built was also based on SQL Server 2000. The built-in XML support in SQL Server 2000 allows the system to create new Microsoft ADO.NET datasets in response to user queries. Lane used ASP.NET and NetAdvantage controls to build data-bound grids that accept those ADO.NET datasets and display them directly on eRIF screens.
- From their new .NET Framework solution, the Casey Foundation can also access important features of Microsoft Office. Reports and documents are the final output from the grant-management system. Before eRIF, grant managers would have to cut and paste this lengthy narrative into Microsoft Word to perform spelling and grammar checks. Lane was able to use Microsoft Office XP's exposed object model to build a Web service that provides grammar- and spell-checking from within the new application.
- The eRIF application also integrates with Microsoft SharePoint to allow electronic documents to be linked and processed along with grant applications. "Before, the grant applications and supporting documents had to be printed out and put into a folder that had to follow the grant application through the process," Lane says. "Now they're simply attached electronically."
- Perhaps most importantly, the new .NET-connected solution has made all of this critical information available to grant managers anytime, anywhere. "One of our responsibilities is evaluating our programs around the country," Dennig explains. "We wanted our people in the field to be able to log on and take action on an application in process."
- As a result, the Foundation reports that they have reduced the time it takes to process grants by 20 to 40 percent. Encouraged by these improvements, they are now planning other ways to use Visual Studio .NET and the Microsoft .NET Framework. "I wouldn't be surprised if we didn't expand the .NET application in two or three years to handle the entire grant management process," Dennig concludes.

For more information about Infragistics NetAdvantage go to:
http://www.infragistics.com/products/netadvantage_portal.asp

NetAdvantage is a complete presentation layer toolset ideal for building commercial class interfaces for Microsoft® Windows®-based applications, XML Web Services, and Web Solutions.

For more information on Infragistics Presentation Layer Framework go to:
<http://www.infragistics.com/products/dotnet/netwinformsplf.asp>

For information regarding the increasing importance of presentation layer development within the application development lifecycle go to:
<http://www.infragistics.com/gartner/gartner.asp>

About Infragistics

Infragistics is the market leader in providing a broad range of presentation layer development tools and services for building applications utilizing Microsoft .NET, COM, and Java environments. Over the past 15 years, Infragistics has received over 220 product awards and industry vendor of the year awards from market-leading publications and resellers. Infragistics' diverse product line for Windows Forms, ASP.NET, Tablet PC, COM, and Java environments are used worldwide in nearly every Fortune 2000 Company, over 96,000 corporations and 200,000 independent developers and consultants. For more information or to arrange an introduction or technical demonstration of Infragistics development tools, please visit www.infragistics.com or call us at 1-800-231-8588.

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Powering The Presentation Layer