British Film Commission case study

Overview

The British Film Commission (BFC) needed to re-develop their company database in order to offer more interactive functionality with a more user-friendly look and feel. The new contact management system had to link directly into the web and email and be capable of mail merges and generating reports. BFC chose Dunstan Thomas because of their expertise in developing applications in Delphi, the product used to develop the original system.

Client Comment

"The contact management system developed by Dunstan Thomas is crucial to the running Of BFC as it contains all client, company, production and other third party data. Dunstan Thomas has created a solution that is intuitive and rich in functionality. Dunstan Thomas provides a helpful, flexible service. Their dedication to customer care has meant that we feel the project is as important to them as it is to us."
Lisa Callinan, Communications Officer

Benefits

Company Backgrounds

The British Film Commission is funded by the Film Council, to promote the UK as an international film-production centre and to encourage the use of British locations, services, facilities and personnel. The BFC provides information on all matters relevant to overseas filmmakers contemplating production in the UK. In a nutshell, their mission is to make sure that "any film that can be made in the UK is made in the UK". Finally, the BFC also acts as an umbrella organisation for the UK Film Commission Network, which comprises 24 different regional offices.

Dunstan Thomas delivers business solutions by providing IT consulting, software development, full project lifecycle and training services. Founded in 1986 the company provides experience and innovative solutions to a broad range of clients in the Financial Services, Telecommunications, Energy, Utility and other sectors. The company is committed to providing quality services through its ISO 9001 accreditation and its partner relationships with Microsoft, Rational and Borland.

The Situation

When Dunstan Thomas first began working for BFC they had a database that was not user friendly and lacked interactivity. Reports programmed into the system could not be updated or re-formatted in-house as the expertise wasn't in place. This meant that it was not possible to re-format changes to letterheads, fax cover sheets, memos etc. and create other pre-programmed document formatting. The database was efficient for storing information but did not cater for more advanced data querying and manipulation.

The Solution

The main purpose of the contact management system, SOLUTION, is to enable the staff to keep track of any related data on films taking place in the U.K. This includes production tracking (production companies, crew and cast members, locations and budgets involved in productions), contact information, company information (such as facility companies, who, for example, provide lighting or catering) as well as any enquiries relating to a production.

SOLUTION integrates with Microsoft technologies such as Outlook and Word and also Seagate Crystal Reports, which enable staff to carry out all operations from within the same application.

Key Functionality:

- **Contact Detail**

    SOLUTION allows for the entry of all the details of any contact that may be involved in the film business. This includes: location details, related companies, all enquiries made by the contact and categories to which the contact or company may belong. For example: whether the contact is a producer, whether he/she subscribes to the BFC Newsletter, any related productions and industry awards that the contact may have won. The list of categories is dynamic - at present there are over 200 split into 3 groups. This enables easy classification of data for sending mailshots and related documents.

- **Production Detail**

    SOLUTION allows for the entry of all production details. This includes general information such as each contact's address whilst on location, the status of filming, the estimated budget for the production, related companies and the role they play in the production, and also cast and crew members. To view in-depth information on any crew member for example, the user can access complete details at a double click. Intuitive navigation is one of the hallmarks of SOLUTION, coupled with the ability to filter for multiple data views easily and quickly.

- **Company Detail**

   SOLUTION allows for the entry of all company details. This includes general information such as related contact names, productions that the company is/was involved with and categories relating to the company.

- **Enquiry Detail**

   SOLUTION allows for the entry of all enquiry details. An enquiry always pertains to a contact and a production. A feature of this function is the ease with which the user can search for the contact and associated production. Part of SOLUTION's functionality is to help with enquiries that need the assistance of the UK's national/regional screen commission offices and a facility has been created to track the status of such enquiries.

- **Generation of Client Letters**

   One of the most time-consuming aspects of the Film Commission's core database activity is the generation of letters. A feature that allows the automation of letter generation has been built into the system based on a set word template. Contact details can be merged into this template on a one-off or mail-shot basis. New mailshots are compiled and saved to a central template location and the template is then made available to all users in a drop-down list. The filter for the mail-shot list is based around the categories to which the contact/company belongs.

- **Report Generation**

   Several management reports can be executed against the database. It is anticipated that the design of the reports will change from time to time therefore the system is integrated with Seagate Crystal Reports in order to offer a totally flexible reporting facility.

Approach

The Rational Unified Process, (RUP) was used to co-ordinate activities. In the inception phase there was business modelling, requirements gathering and requirements analysis. This resulted in the RUP Artifacts consisting of a Vision Document and Use-Case Specification. The Use Cases were then implemented in a series of iterations through the Elaboration and Construction Phases of the project. In the Elaboration Phase the Candidate Architecture (Delphi Windows Client (Incorporating logical Business Tier) and

InterBase RDBMS) was demonstrated in order to reduce project risk. In the Construction Phase the remaining Use Cases were implemented.

Technology and Development

- SOLUTION is built using a feature rich Delphi client connected via Active Data Objects technology to an InterBase database.
- The database comprises comparatively few Tables (around 38) but its complexity lies in the numerous many to many relationships.
- The internal structure of the code was developed along the lines of a three tier architecture separating out the business logic from the user interface, this will enable easy movement if the application needs to be re-deployed to a larger user base or even to an Intranet / Internet application.
- Integration into Outlook for sending email (This is done by double clicking on a contacts email address from within the system) is carried out using the COM interface for Outlook provided by Microsoft.
- Integration into Internet Explorer (This is done by double clicking on a contact or company web-site address from within the system) is carried out using the COM interface for Internet Explorer provided by Microsoft.
- Letter production and viewing done from within the system is accomplished using the COM interface for Word provided by Microsoft.
- The integration of Seagate Crystal Reports is done using the COM interface for Crystal Reports provided by Seagate.