

Joining COBOL & Java

Veryant's isCOBOL Helps Pizzeria Deliver Updated Point-Of-Sale Systems

by Robyn Weisman

SINCE ITS FOUNDING in 1963, Donatos Pizzeria has grown from a single restaurant in Ohio to about 200 of them across six states. Of these restaurants, about 60% are company owned, while the other 40% are franchises; however, as the chain continues to grow, more of these new restaurants will be franchised.

Donatos' COBOL-based PoS (point of sale) solution increasingly was becoming both dated and expensive, explains Mike Born, senior systems engineer at Donatos Pizzeria (www.donatos.com). "We were looking primarily at the fact that we were getting ready to do some significant growth, and the product we were using . . . was going to be cost-prohibitive to grow out and had issues in terms of some of the new functionality that we were adding," Born says. "The traditional system has been just a text-based thing, and we have modified that to use a touch front end by using Web services in the back end. The old COBOL didn't help us get there, basically."

Born searched the Internet and trade publications to find a replacement for Donatos' current system. Most of the COBOL-based solutions he evaluated were either too expensive, posed compatibility issues, or both. Fortunately, there was one exception: isCOBOL Application Platform Suite by Veryant (www.veryant.com). "The isCOBOL was by far the easiest in terms of taking our code base and making relatively few minor tweaks and getting the product up and running," Born says.

Getting Up-To-Date

Born says that Donatos decided on isCOBOL about a year ago and began implementing the solution last summer. Until recently, each Donatos restaurant had a small Linux server and about eight to 10 IT-based workstations running their old COBOL solution. Although the stores themselves are fairly self-contained, each individual store on a nightly basis creates a polling file with some sales and inventory data. This information gets transmitted to the main office, where it is imported into the main network's data warehouse.

Born's team has mapped out a strategy that works in stages to move its restaurants' POS from the old solution to a new Java-based system. isCOBOL acts as the bridge to make this happen by giving Born's team the ability to supply ISAM (Indexed Sequential Access Method) file access to applications on the updated Java platform and then move these ISAM files to a relational database.

This plan enables Donatos to deploy POS terminals that can display legacy applications in conjunction with the updated GUI. In addition, isCOBOL provides programmers with the same GUI regardless of operating system, be it Windows, Linux, or a mobile platform. And isCOBOL programs operate the same in a distributed network environment using isCOBOL Server as they do on a local one.

isCOBOL works especially well with Donatos' timetable. Users can continue to use familiar applications while the transition is taking place. COBOL-based applications and Java-based applications share the same ISAM data files, so the company doesn't have to lose what it has already invested in legacy applications.

Building Out The New System

To test out isCOBOL, Born's group took its existing source code and performed a mass compile in the APS (Application Platform Suite) to make sure it would actually build properly. "About 95% of the programs went over straight out of the box, so to speak, minus a few little things here and there. I actually had a clean build of the product in less than two days," Born says.

"Beyond that, we put [isCOBOL] on the system, took a copy of our



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legacy product and isCOBOL side by side, and banged on them side by side just to make sure we would get the same results,” he says.

According to Born, Donatos’ isCOBOL rollout has gone very well without any major issues. Already, 15 Donatos restaurants have completed the migration from the legacy system to isCOBOL, and Donatos has scheduled the same implementation for 30 more stores over the next two to three months. He hopes to complete the transition over the next year but acknowledges that the company may need some additional time because of the logistics involved. “We’d like to have it all done today, but we are geographically dispersed throughout the Midwest and the South, and it just takes a lot of time to do 180 of these things,” says Born.

Training By Doing

According to Born, isCOBOL has not only done everything Donatos needed it to do, it has done so without creating new issues for his staff to contend with. For one thing, says Born, Donatos wanted to leverage the Java platform and upgrade the POS systems in all of the chain’s restaurants without forcing his small IT staff to have to be retrained in Java or rewrite new Java code from scratch. The isCOBOL Compiler, one of the six primary tools in the isCOBOL APS, allows for code development in an ANSI-compliant COBOL environment that enables users then to deploy

this code on platforms that support JVM (Java Virtual Machine). isCOBOL Compiler offers users an object-oriented programming method with native support for Unicode and JavaBean graphical controls.

Perhaps the most useful aspect of isCOBOL Compiler is that you don’t need to know Java to use it. In fact, Born, who describes himself as a COBOL programmer, uses isCOBOL to help him learn the ins and outs of Java as Donatos migrates toward a Java-based system. “The fact that isCOBOL actually compiles into Java has been an aid in the learning curve of that piece,” Born says. “If I’m trying to figure out something in Java, I can write a little routine in COBOL [and] compile it in isCOBOL, which then compiles it to Java, and I can look at it and kind of use that as a learning basis of what I need my Java application to do.”

Excellent Price & Support

Veryant isCOBOL’s ability to let Born’s staff take Donatos’ code base and get it running in a platform with minimal work and hassle was Donatos’ No. 1 reason for choosing it over its competitors. Its price point was a close second, given that it was a less expensive solution than the other incomplete solutions that he researched.

Born says customer and technical support were not a part of the original equation; however, he notes that Veryant’s support has turned out to be another strong point with the

isCOBOL solution. “It’s been nothing short of excellent. They understood that we had set a fairly aggressive time frame for our project and have been highly responsive,” Born says. “When something didn’t quite work the way we needed it, they have been quick to suggest alternative ways to accomplish it or, in some cases, do some tweaks to the product to help us out. And once we got past the initial build-out of the system, our support needs have been pretty minimal,” Born says. ■

Veryant isCOBOL Application Platform Suite

A suite of products that gives users the ability to develop, maintain, and modernize their COBOL-based applications and compile and deploy these applications into Java.

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