

Bridgestone/Firestone New Zealand Enhances Customer Service With DataMirror DB/XML Transform Software

Commentary by Mike Boon, Information Systems Analyst, BFNZ

INDUSTRY

MANUFACTURING & RETAIL

BUSINESS APPLICATION

BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS
INTEGRATION

DB/XML Transform ^{DataMirror™}

Bridgestone/Firestone New Zealand (BFNZ) was formed in September 1998 following the merger of two of New Zealand's largest tire companies, Bridgestone and Firestone. Employing over 800 New Zealanders nationwide today, BFNZ is the leading tire manufacturer and retailer in the country, selling tires under both the Bridgestone and Firestone brands. BFNZ also operates three retread factories in New Zealand, which produce quality truck, light truck and grader retreads for the New Zealand market. Visit BFNZ on the Web at www.bridgestone-firestone.co.nz.

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Mike Boon, Information Systems Analyst, BFNZ

The Problem

With over 200 retail outlets in New Zealand who sell and service Bridgestone and Firestone tires ranging from large national customers to small dealer and reseller tire

businesses, BFNZ required a solution to improve the speed and reduce the cost of delivering invoices to its customers. BFNZ uses traditional electronic data interchange (EDI) software, which is a pre-requisite in the automotive supplier marketplace, however the Company found that many of its customers could not accept EDI data. BFNZ's alternatives were to use a third-party message carrier with message-based charges or find a software solution that would allow the Company to generate the invoice data in the format its customers require.

BFNZ's computing environment consists of an iSeries (AS/400) server that runs the Company's enterprise resource planning (ERP) application, BPCS from SSA Global Technologies, along with a number of Microsoft Windows NT Servers with various custom-built mail, financial planning and executive information system (EIS) applications. BFNZ required an XML tool that would enable it to capture customer invoice data from its iSeries-based ERP system and transform the data into XML, HTML or text-based format to send to customers. Because the Company's critical ERP data was housed on its iSeries, it wanted a software solution that would work seamlessly in its current environment. The Company also sought a vendor with considerable iSeries expertise.

"We were finding more and more often that our EDI technology was not compatible with our customers' various computing environments," says Mike Boon, Information Systems Analyst at BFNZ. "As XML is quickly becoming the industry standard for communicating business information, we realized that implementing an XML-based tool would enable us to reach more of

our customers in a format compatible with their computing environments and would ultimately save us valuable time and resources by streamlining the invoicing process."

The Solution

With the help of eeeXPNENTS New Zealand Ltd., a consultant for BFNZ and a DataMirror Business Partner, BFNZ began a search on the Internet for an XML tool that would meet their needs and could be easily integrated into the Company's iSeries computing environment. Because of the software's ability to run under any platform that supports Java combined with DataMirror's extensive knowledge of iSeries environments, BFNZ selected DataMirror DB/XML Transform as its solution of choice.

"DataMirror's strong presence in the iSeries market and the product's versatility were key elements in the decision to implement DB/XML Transform," says Boon. "In terms of other XML tools on the market, DB/XML Transform is more cost effective because it is an out-of-the-box solution that required no programming to work in our existing environment. DB/XML Transform also offers greater functionality in its ability to transform data between XML, and a broad range of database and text formats."

Using DB/XML Transform, data transformation to or from other formats such as HTML, XHTML, WML and EDI can be easily achieved. DB/XML Transform is capable of retrieving data from a database and formatting it in XML to BFNZ's specifications, or vice versa. The software's powerful, bi-directional data transformation engine and unique ability to transform hierarchical data make it ideal for building business-to-business applications, data exchange and database integration solutions.

The Benefits

Within two months of carrying out trials with the product, BFNZ went live with its first trading partner using DB/XML Transform. Since then, another trading partner is now benefiting from using the software and two others are considering adopting the new delivery system.

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BFNZ expects the use of electronic invoices to rise to at least 30% in the near future. BFNZ has not only automated the delivery of its invoices, but it has also refreshed their format and look, enabling them to be viewed and printed using current print technology. Additionally, BFNZ can more cost effectively and easily archive these documents. Using DB/XML Transform, the company has reduced the cost of delivering invoices in a number of ways. Not only does BFNZ save on printing materials as well as postal, fax and courier services, but DB/XML Transform has drastically reduced the staff time involved in invoice printing and delivery preparation.

"From a customer service and cash collections point of view, all of our customer-facing employees directly benefit from DB/XML Transform," says Boon. "We can now provide better presentation and delivery of our invoices in a format that is easier to read and understand. Ultimately, the software helps us to build and strengthen customer relationships by improving the invoicing process and enhancing the ease of business transactions."

A look to the future

With DB/XML Transform fully implemented and running, BFNZ expects to extend the company's delivery capabilities even further by using the solution to provide customer sales data and business messages to its employees, trading partners and customers.

"We are confident that XML-based tools will continue to drive business communications into the future," says Boon. "In an industry that is driven by the ability to deliver critical data to the people who need it – whether it is customer information or invoicing data – having a solution like DataMirror DB/XML Transform in place that enhances this process will enable us to improve our competitive position and reduce the costs of business."



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