Vision Voice Vantage, Inc.

THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX IN CUSTOMER SERVICE

I don't receive Health Benefits or Take Days Off

Inside this issue:

You Need to Know Where You Came From to Know Where You are Going

With the release of the new OS from IBM for the i/iSeries/AS400 platform, it seemed proper to do a newsletter on where we came from and where we are going.

I started Ohio Data Transfer back in the early 80's to service the IBM Midrange marketplace that was the IBM 34 and System 38 at that time. The primary focus of our business was inexpensive twinax printers and terminals. Our I/O solutions next included emulation cards that became available in 1983. It was a logical step as the emulation card turned the widely popular new Personal Computers into simple terminals and the PC printers into local workstation printers. Then came protocol convertors, SDLC compatible controllers and a whole host of various products to address the communication needs of IBM midrange users. All the solutions that ODT offered had a similar central point, they allowed some form of I/O solution. At that point in time, ODT became noted for providing affordable alternative type devices for mid-range users and at times, the ability to do some things that even IBM couldn't do. A popular trend was PC applications that worked with data found on the host. These were called Client Server Applications and ODT Clients, with our assistance did a lot of it. In fact we did so much of it, I was asked at one time to speak to a group of salesmen for an large IBM business partner

back in the early 90's just as the AS400 was introduced how to do host to PC connectivity. As I did in most presentations of this type, I started with a discussion of the PC connectivity to a System 36 & System 38. A young salesman interrupted me saying, "We don't need to hear about the System 38, we sell the new AS400." I replied, "You can't properly do that and convince the IBM host user to upgrade to the newer system if you don't know the difference in the two systems and the benefits of where they need to go to."

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History of ODTVision VRU

Ohio Data Transfer had been in the business of I/O solutions for about fifteen years and had been looking for a specialty where we could use our expertise in PC to host connectivity. We saw the great demand coming for telephony solutions and there just wasn't much available. There were several distinct goals we wanted to address:

- Provide a customizable interface that could be tailored around client's applications by the end-user requiring no previous programming experience
- Provide short customization and development cycles
- Enhance the IBM mid-range marketplace by allowing telephony applications which use host data without any modification to the host system
- Have scalability for future capacity needs
- Provide a migration path for future enhancements to our solution where no existing client's customization is lost when going to new releases or generations of our solution
- Be a reliable product that is easy to maintain and administer
- Be one of the most affordable telephony solutions available with a large ROI and provide a short payback period

. When you think back to our initial product, it was a DOS based PC which came in either a twinax model for IBM System 36/38 that came with 7 LU's or a coax model for IBM Mainframe Systems. This was a simple desktop PC in a mini tower case with an emulation card and the product used a voice card called Big Mouth. IBM has not invented Client Access yet and was still doing APPN connectivity through a product called PC Support. When the AS400 first came out, they still used a version of PC Support that used the Wall Data Router. Wall Data then became NetSoft and then NetManage. Our first generation used this router same router. We used Rumba for years to provide our Screen Scraping API. ODT marketed the solution as the DTT1000 VRU.

The DTT1000 VRU had six major generations with multiple releases for each. For the most part, new generations were primarily used when Microsoft introduced a new Operational System on the PC or if there was a major re-write. There were many new releases within each generation to provide minor features and changes.

Generation 2.0 of our product was a major change as we used Windows 3.11 and provided the first GUI screens to assist the user in system administration.

Generation 3.0 took the unit in a new direction where our solution now met "ODBC" standards. This allowed interactive connectivity to databases (other platforms) as well as the screen scraping session to the IBM hosts. This release also contained our own database manager utility.

Generation 4.0 took us to Windows 98 and we switched from Netsoft Routers to Rumba which allowed us to reset the unit
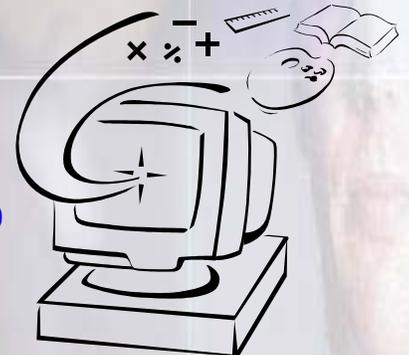
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automatically as the subsystem went up and down. We also went to Dialogic voice cards as Dialogic became the industry standard and most widely used voice cards. One of the most important features within this release was the introduction of the "Test Mode" which allowed testing and development on any Windows based PC which could be then moved to the production unit. We did away with our own database manager which was replaced with an API to Microsoft Access. The Voice Manager Utility was added which allowed voice files to be recorded on any sound card & then be moved to our unit.

Generation 5.0 was on Windows 2000 Professional and introduce the "Control Window" which allowed scheduling of batch type functions. Also new in this generation was multi-language support, email support, line capacity monitoring, and improved logging methods for the establishment of audit trails. An option that allowed an API to Microsoft Outlook was also introduced in this generation where the unit could now send emails on demand.

Generation 6.0 introduced options such as Text to Speech. A widely popular feature in this release was the ability to configure an office open or closed database where the unit knew if the office is currently open or closed. This was the last release of the DTT1000 product which was based on an old development utility from the 90's. We then undertook a major re-write to give our solution the ability to do telephony functions now being done that weren't available in the 90's.

Migration Path

The DTT1000 product features and options served as a base but we developed a totally new product based on new telephony utilities that still allowed any existing customer to migrate without redoing their own in-house customization scripts. The new product was named "ODTVision" and Ohio Data Transfer became Vision Voice Vantage. Our primary goal with any new release is to make the solution easier to use and to provide additional functionality. What has made our solution so strong over the years is that it has been designed by our clients and their needs. I was at an IBM Business Partner meeting a few years ago and I made the statement, "Development doesn't happen in a vacuum, it comes from marketing." Several people in this meeting seemed surprised at that statement but it is just how things are done. We are always telling our clients, "Tell us what you want the ODTVision VRU to do that it doesn't do, and we will put that idea on the Development Wish List. If it increases Functionality, can be done, and meets the needs of number of clients, it most likely will be included on our next release. I can look back at the various features of our VRU like….start stop individual lines (from a large university) sizing and movement of the Line Detail Window (from a large retailer), and I can remember who wanted what and when it was added.

At the same IBM Business Partner meeting mentioned before, I was discussing the issue of trying to keep the product compliant with Microsoft standards. The IBM representatives seemed to take issue with that statement like we weren't concern with what IBM was doing, but the API's to the IBM host have stayed constant while the operating systems of the PCs and the API's to Microsoft products are constantly changing.

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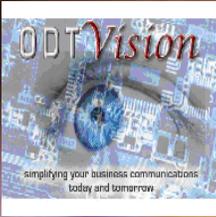
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T H I N K I N G O U T S I D E T H E B O X

Get Your Own Demo Today

Contact us to get your own demonstration of the ODTVision Voice Response Unit. This demo application is a simplistic order entry and shipment status system which is running off a Microsoft Access database. The demo is in the test mode and you will be using the "Test Phone" feature of the ODT VISION VRU to simulate a phone call to the data. Manuals and case studies are also available on the web site.

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Current Product

    We are currently in our second generation of the ODTVison VRU solution since the creation of the new product. The DTT1000 VRU is discontinued but we still support existing customers. The current solution still has the features found in previous products and still has a built in migration path for existing customers but they will find it easier to use. Since the new unit doesn't use "Vox" audio file formats, there is no need to do a voice file conversion; you can just record the voice files in the standard "wav" format. If you need connectivity to the IBM host, this is now done with IBM's Client Access (feature requested by clients).   We have enhanced the debug and log features, and enhanced the customization syntax to make customization easier. The screens are more modern and dynamic in nature but any existing customer will see familiar concepts and know how to use

the new version or our solution. Please refer to the November 2009 newsletter on how to migrate from the DTT1000 unit to the newer ODTVision VRU.

Future Development

    We are currently working on the next generation and have identified several areas where we want to improve. Here are the things we are working on:
- Will be ".net" compliant
- Will move from Microsoft Access database to SQL. (This will aid in portatblity, connectivity and will eliminate some of the restrictions that Microsoft Access has)
- Will have a new improved compiler which is also its own editor that instantly tells the user if there is a script grammar error
- Will allow customization with SQL as well as with our current "basic" like scripting lanuage

Three years ago we made a major decision to upgrade the ODTVision so it could do VOIP, digital, and use many new telephony features but at the same time allow existing customers a migration path so there is no loss of previous investment. If you have any suggestions as to what you would like to see in our product, let us know. It has been a pleasure serving the midrange market-place for some thirty years now and we look forward to serving your needs in the future.◻

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