



Digital TV Provider Connects Services More Than 70 Per Cent Faster

Overview

Country or Region: Benelux

Industry: Media and entertainment—Radio, television, cable, and satellite

Customer Profile

Microsoft® Gold Certified Partner Porthus, headquartered in Belgium, delivers on-demand IT services to hundreds of businesses around the world.

Business Situation

Porthus had to build a large-scale on-demand service that connected all back-office systems, including customer registration and account management, for a digital TV services provider.

Solution

The partner used the Microsoft Connected Services Framework 3.0 and brought together multiple databases, a trouble ticketing system, and customer portal for managing services.

Benefits

- Fast deployment.
- Low total cost of ownership.
- Successful relationship.

“Using the Microsoft Connected Services Framework, we delivered a complex solution more than 70 per cent faster. Our success was due to ... the experience of our developers and the intelligence of the solution.”

Frank Hamerlinck, Chief Operations Officer, Porthus

Porthus faced a major challenge when a digital TV provider asked for an on-demand service. It wanted to deliver interactive digital TV, enriched with operational and business support systems, which also integrated with its back-office and commercial-services systems—all within a 6-month delivery deadline. The Microsoft® Gold Certified Partner needed a solution that could create a service-oriented architecture, integrate multiple applications, and offer flexibility for future development. Porthus chose the Microsoft Connected Services Framework 3.0. This connects content services and networks, such as customer and product information databases, back-office systems, systems for order handling and billing, and a customer portal. A deployment of this size could take 18 months, but, with Microsoft technology, Porthus finished the work more than 70 per cent faster, well within the deadline.

“Following a thorough analysis, we aimed to design a solution that met the customer’s requirements, deadlines, and budget.”

Frank Hamerlinck, Chief Operations Officer, Porthus

Situation

With headquarters in Belgium, Porthus provides on-demand IT services to more than 1,000 companies across the world. In 2007, the company saw net revenues increase by almost 50 per cent to nearly €16 million (U.S.\$25 million).

These figures highlight the huge rate of growth for on-demand services. Companies like the fact that hosted, on-demand solutions drastically reduce the time and expense of launching new business applications. Increasingly, they are turning to companies such as Porthus to manage all the software development and even fine-tune services once they’re up and running.

Supporters of this new software-as-a-service delivery model include digital TV providers. In 2006, a leading provider asked Porthus for a large-scale service that would allow its sales channels to connect new subscribers and implement solutions that deliver additional channels and features, such as video on demand. In addition, the solution needed to operate services such as ticketing systems, the generation of billing information, and the logging of viewer’s behaviour for marketing purposes. Previously, even basic administrative processes were inefficient and time consuming, and delivery was slow and complex. The plan was to make communications and data handling much easier and improve the customer experience.

Porthus saw a number of challenges. There needed to be deep integration of a large number of existing applications, some of which were provided by third parties. What’s more, the service had to be incredibly robust. Given the high number of viewers, there could be a lot of data being transferred at any one time. More urgent, however, was the timeline that Porthus had to meet when it came to delivering the solution.

Frank Hamerlinck, Chief Operations Officer at Porthus, says: “We walked away from our discussions with the customer knowing we had just six months to finish the project. Following a thorough analysis, we aimed to design a solution that met the customer’s requirements, deadlines, and budget.”

Solution

At the start of the project, Porthus looked at technologies from Oracle, IBM, and BEA. But after assessing the needs of the customer, it chose the Microsoft® Connected Services Framework 3.0, an integrated, server-based software product that aggregates, provisions, and manages disparate services to deliver a service-oriented architecture (SOA). The advantage of this is that it decouples applications from operating systems and programming languages. In simple terms, the technology makes it a lot easier to integrate and roll out new services to end users by reducing the complexities of back-end systems. Furthermore, it helps ensure data can travel over any network and to any device, including low-bandwidth and wireless networks. The framework also integrates with a number of additional Microsoft services, such as the Microsoft Internet Protocol Television software environment and Xbox® gaming.

The solution began to take shape quickly. It connected multiple services for business-related product and customer information across the organisation, a trouble ticketing system, and a customer portal for managing services. In addition to the Connected Services Framework, the project brought together a number of other Microsoft technologies, including:

- Windows Server® 2003 Service Pack 2 (SP2), providing the operating system
- Microsoft .NET Framework 2.0, the core programming environment

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- Microsoft Office SharePoint® Portal Server 2003, providing the core portal infrastructure
- Microsoft SQL Server® 2005 Service Pack 2 (SP2) database software, which delivered database services
- Internet Information Services 6.0, which operated as a Web server

Before the work was completed, Microsoft Gold Certified Partner Porthus designed a separate order handling module. Hamerlinck says: “The order handling module in the Connected Services Framework wasn’t fast enough for our purposes, but it was simple to build another module for the framework without delaying the project.”

Microsoft helped Porthus develop the architecture and review its supportability. To meet performance needs, Microsoft product managers worked with lead architects at Porthus, delivering a solution that was capable of handling hundreds of thousands of simultaneous requests.

By May 2007, the work was finished. User groups across the organisation and customers could access information, request new services, and update records easily from anywhere using an Internet connection.

Benefits

Digital TV is a young market. In recent years, there has been a clear advantage in rapid development. Due to Porthus and Microsoft technologies, a major digital TV provider in Belgium needed only a few months to take its back-office and customer-facing systems to a new level and drive growth. Importantly for Porthus, the project has boosted business, helping the Microsoft partner win new contracts.

Faster Time to Market

The Connected Services Framework offers Porthus an existing infrastructure, helping it accelerate project delivery. The framework is also designed to ensure faster time to market for future services, helping to secure Porthus’ long-term investment. These new services will be defined in the product catalogue, and functions for selling, management, and billing already exist. Virtually any new service can be added because the technology integrates with non-Microsoft based services.

The Connected Services Framework dramatically cuts development costs. Without it, every new service would require an extensive integration project, taking as long as a year and a half. It also enhances the company’s competitive edge. Porthus has put its customer in a strong position to capitalise on the exponential growth in digital TV services. New customers can register online in minutes and connected back-end systems make account administration easy.

“Using the Microsoft Connected Services Framework, we delivered a complex solution more than 70 per cent faster,” comments Hamerlinck. “Our success was due to two key things: the experience of our developers and the intelligence of the solution.”

Low Total Cost of Ownership

The key advantage of SOA is that new services can be added simply. Porthus created special WES adaptors so that any third-party applications can be opened through the Connected Services Framework without additional development work.

Says Hamerlinck: “The Connected Services Framework makes it quick and easy to add new services without spending significant resources on software development. The solution that we’ve delivered avoids the need to ‘rip and replace’ your IT investments every time a business wants to extend its offering.”

For More Information

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For more information about Porthus products and services, call +32 3 800 0600 or visit the Web site at: www.porthus.com

Microsoft Partnership Drives Business

The work for the digital TV provider highlights the successful relationship between Porthus and Microsoft. As a result, Porthus has continued to win major projects across the region. At present, it is working on a similar type of solution for a set-top box provider in the Netherlands. Hamerlinck says: "Our relationship with Microsoft has grown closer and closer. We work together on different events and summits where we promote the Connected Services Framework."

He adds: "Because of the relationship we have with Microsoft, our developers know that experts are always at the end of a telephone if they need them. Even better, the support we receive means our in-house skills in Microsoft technology are always cutting-edge and we can deliver real value to our customers."

Microsoft Server Product Portfolio

For more information about the Microsoft server product portfolio, go to: www.microsoft.com/servers/default.aspx

Software and Services

- Microsoft Server Product Portfolio
 - Microsoft SQL Server 2005
- Microsoft Office
 - Microsoft Office SharePoint Portal Server 2003

Technologies

- Microsoft Connected Services Framework 3.0
- Microsoft .NET Framework
- Internet Information Services 6.0