



UPDATE

The Case for Custom Development

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Is custom development a viable option for the average small-to-medium sized enterprise?

When does it make sense to consider a custom application?

Why should a company spend on development when the market seems flooded with shrink-wrapped, specialised software?

What many customers don't realize is that custom development is often the only way small-to-medium sized enterprises (SMEs) can leverage their existing IT investments to the maximum. Here's why:

In the current economic environment, SMEs are burdened with shrinking budgets, and are looking for ways to squeeze the most out of their IT infrastructure. Those who invest in appropriate infrastructure to run their businesses expect the technology to improve productivity, enhance competitive position in their respective market space and to cut overall costs of operation. Achieving all these benefits, however, can be difficult.

For one thing, no two enterprises are alike. While off-the-shelf solutions can provide a solid IT infrastructure and state-of-the-art software to handle most of an enterprise's needs, many companies will have a unique set of requirements that simply cannot be addressed with a pre-packaged product – no matter how costly or specialised.

For example, one company may require specialised reports to communicate meaningful information to their investors, while another may need to track specific information on their manufacturing processes in order to better control costs. This is where a

custom application comes in. It provides the means to translate complex processes and data into meaningful information tailored for the unique needs of an enterprise, so that efficiency and productivity are optimized. Without this customization, companies are hard-pressed to reap all the benefits their technology is supposed to deliver.

But what about the cost?

When SMEs hear the term "custom development" they often cringe, thinking the cost will be excessive and the time to develop the solution will be lengthy. Certainly this can be true if they search for an off-the-shelf solution, which can run into the hundreds of thousands of dollars, and expect to simply tailor it to their needs.

But can developing an application from scratch really be cost-effective?

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With BMI's approach to custom development, this is certainly the case.

Under the umbrella of our Professional Services Group, we have defined a set of services that significantly reduce the cost of custom development, making it a realistic alternative for SMEs. We've been able to do this because of two distinct advantages over our larger competitors:

- 1) **We're small** – which leads to BIG advantages. Being a SME ourselves means we're not only sensitive to the issues relevant to SMEs, but that we can be more flexible, can maintain a lower cost-structure on a per-developer basis, and can offer a personalised approach that enables us to truly understand our customer's businesses.
- 2) **We're big** – on consulting. After ten years of specialising in needs analysis, business systems analysis, and infrastructure design, our professional team brings this experience to bear on properly defining the parameters for a project from the outset. And herein lies the key. Whether our customers have already invested in technology that needs to be optimized, or require our assistance to put infrastructure in place, our background in analysis and solutions modelling enables us to implement appropriate technologies cost-effectively.

Backing up these advantages is our rigorous project management methodology. This involves including our cus-

tomers in the analysis and planning phase, from which a detailed plan covering the project from start to finish is produced. Customers know from the outset the level of effort required, the budget, the deadlines for each major task and when elements of the project will be delivered. Weekly reports track development progress, assuring customers that deadlines are being respected, and that costs are under control.

We've had great results using this methodology. Customers appreciate it, because they know in advance what their outlay is going to be, when the development project will be delivered and, further, they know it will fit their needs because it is they who help define the requirements.

It is in this way that custom development can produce a return on investment in short order, which is measured in improved productivity, better control over internal processes, and the peace of mind knowing that investments in technology deliver optimal results.



For more information on BMI's Professional Services, see our website:

www.beauvelmicro.com

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Customer Focus: A Case in Point

One BMI customer, a large academic institution comprising several schools, requires up-to-date information on students in order to determine their eligibility to access certain facilities.

When BMI was asked to assess the situation, the institution was using an 'off the shelf' client management system with which they were experiencing consistent and recurring problems.

For example, not only was data being transmitted in different formats to the institution, but the type of information sent from each school differed greatly. This created a cascade effect of various problems, including the generation of duplicate entries in the database – a result of the same student being a member of two different schools, as well as the similarity in names from one student to another.

The institution asked BMI to develop a solution to solve the problem.

Consistent with BMI's project methodology, a complete analysis of the entire data importation process was done. This included the format of the data from the schools, the structure of the database, the existing software 'fix' that was in place and an appraisal of how the institution needed to use the data.

This process took approximately three weeks of consultant time, resulting in a detailed recommendations report.

With the go-ahead given, BMI's development team was then brought in to streamline the importation process, which included 'scrubbing' all data, eliminating double entries and re-importing properly formatted information.

The institution now has an accurate, maintainable database that preserves the integrity of their information.

This will ensure the institution's security needs are met, and that the client management process will be more efficient – which goes a long way to improve customer satisfaction... for students and administrators alike.

The moral of the story?

Custom development - including proper needs analysis - can make the difference between lost productivity and enjoying the full benefits an investment in technology is supposed to deliver.





Putting Technology to Work in Rwanda: Geekcorps in Action

David Smith, known to many BMI customers for his work on custom database projects, is back from a two month stint as a volunteer for Geekcorps in Rwanda.

Geekcorps is a non-profit organization committed to helping communities around the world gain access to information technology. It pairs skilled volunteers from the high-tech world with small-to-medium sized businesses in developing nations training those volunteers to transfer skills to people from different backgrounds.

Due to his database expertise and ability to work in French, David was chosen to team up with Rwandan software developers Alpha-Soft, to help design a database system for the GACACA project. GACACA is the Rwandan judicial process that will be used to handle over 110,000 prisoners still awaiting trial since the 1994 genocide. The

custom software will be used to create the court docket system and track information once the trials are underway.

You can read more about David's incredible adventure, and the important work driven by Geekcorps at the following links:

<http://pages.globetrotter.net/drsmith/rwanda/RwandaJournal.htm>

<http://www.geekcorps.org>

*information for this article taken from the above web sites.



David Smith on location in Rwanda - photo from his online journal



Channel News

WatchGuard Specials

SOHO 6 Model Users Take Advantage of these Upgrades:

VPNforce™ Port Upgrade
Segregate Branch Office VPN and Secure Wireless Connections

Dual ISP Port Upgrade
Get failover protection where ISP connections are unreliable, such as branch offices, retail and point-of-sale.



STAY AHEAD OF THE NEXT THREAT



BMI Announcements

BMI is pleased to welcome Sandro Censi to the PSG Group.

As a programmer-analyst, Sandro brings an impressive set of skills to BMI's development team.

With his experience working in a multitude of programming languages, such as JAVA and JavaScript, and environments, he will participate in a wide variety of development projects in the coming year, including E-Transact web sites.

Tech Corner

Security Hotfixes Key to Protecting your Network

Last year, panic ensued with the discovery that Microsoft's operating system contained inherent flaws that allowed intruders to hack into internal machines on a network. Take into account the less publicized fact that other operating systems, including the popular Linux, had the same or more security alerts in 2002 than Windows 2000, and you'll get a sense for just how prevalent the growing problem of cyber intrusion is.

Needless to say, network security has become a top concern for IT managers worldwide. Most companies have implemented basic security measures, such as a firewall and an enterprise-wide anti-virus solution (which includes email filtering). These two solutions are critical to safe computing. The problem, however, is that even a properly configured firewall cannot stop intruders from entering ports that are intentionally left open to external traffic.

Web and Mail servers are the weakest link

Web servers and mail servers are the most common culprits for this security "lapse". These machines are prime targets for hackers, because their function requires them to be visible to the external network, which therefore leaves them exposed. To ensure network security, these public machines must be made safe from outside attack using accepted protocols.

The response from systems developers has been to release a series of patches or 'hotfixes' in an effort to make their products more secure. These fixes have now taken on critical importance in the ongoing fight to keep networks safe.

Staying current is an administrative nightmare

While keeping up-to-date with the hotfixes is essential, they create a whole other set of problems for the network administrators who have to implement them. For one thing, in a multi-vendor environment, conflicts between software programs abound.

This means that each hotfix should be tested prior to installation, to ensure that it doesn't 'break' the entire operating system.

The onus falls on the network administrator to know which products are installed locally and to make a judgement call whether each individual fix will adversely affect critical systems, which could result in possible downtime and/or loss of data.

With sixty-four hotfixes released last year by Microsoft alone, most companies simply do not have the staff nor the time required to test and deploy multiple fixes across their entire fleet of machines.

BMI's Hotlist is the ultimate Hotfix

To alleviate this problem for our customers, BMI has developed the ultimate hotfix list. This **HOTLIST** includes all the released hotfixes to date, the security issues they are meant to address, as well as a list of known problems to exist between the hotfix and other programs. Developed over the last year as we have systematically updated and maintained fleets for our service customers, the hotlist enables us to quickly and efficiently deploy appropriate fixes to our customers' best advantage.

BMI customers having an outsourcing or service contract with us receive hotfix updates as part of their regular maintenance schedule. These customers can rest assured that everything is being done to protect the integrity of their information assets, leaving them free to focus on their core businesses.



Don't leave your network unprotected!

If you don't have a service agreement with BMI, but would like to have your system security-proofed, call today for a FREE Security Risk Assessment. This service provides a "snapshot" of your system's vulnerabilities, identifies areas of risk and recommends an appropriate protection strategy to suit your needs. We can then follow through with your Hotfix update, to ensure maximum defense against intrusion.

DAMAGE REPORT

Think all the dire talk about viruses and cyber-attacks is a lot of hype? Think again! Consider these stats* on the cost of damages resulting from lost productivity and recovery efforts for the years 2000-2001:

Nimda	\$635 million	Code Red	\$2.62 billion
SirCam	\$1.15 billion	LoveBug	\$8.75 billion

- Amounts in US dollars

* From Toronto's Globe & Mail, Nov. 18, 2002. Stats provided by Computer Economics.

Call today for your free security risk assessment.

Your feedback is important to us!

Have questions or comments?
Forward your inquiries to:

info@beauvelmicro.com

Want to receive future newsletters via email? Just let us know by sending a request to the above email address.

514.840.1377



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