

CASE STUDY: EASTERN CONNECTION LINKS DATA WITH MICROSOFT BIZTALK AND GREYSTONE SOLUTIONS



Using Microsoft® BizTalk® Server 2004, Microsoft Visual Studio® .NET and Microsoft SQL Server™, Greystone Solutions created a Message Processor for Eastern Connection, the largest regional express parcel carrier on the East Coast. By storing information in a central warehouse, the Message Processor integrates the Company's shipping, tracking and tracing information system with an AirClic message server so that information can be easily retrieved, manipulated, analyzed and shared. With this higher level of data accessibility, Eastern Connection can now increase administrative efficiency, improve delivery chain effectiveness and enhance overall customer service.

Situation

Founded in 1983, Eastern Connection delivers parcels throughout the Northeastern United States, handling more than 8000 packages each day. Catering to the business-to-business market, the Company provides delivery services to more than 5000 zip codes from Maine to Virginia.

Behind the scenes, Eastern Connection tracks each delivery with a Bill of Lading (BOL). Every package receives a unique BOL with a bar code that identifies the sender, receiver, origination and destination of the package. A crucial part of the Company's business, the BOL system drives everything from creating accurate invoices to analyzing the efficiency of regional offices, routes and drivers.

Originally, the BOL system was paper-based and required manual data entry. After each point of delivery, drivers called the home office with updated BOL information. At that point, the specifics on each BOL – from driver and package to signatory and time of delivery – were manually keyed into a database. As the company continued to grow, the strain on internal resources became intense.

"Eastern Connection performed tens of thousands of deliveries every week," says Dennis Villano, Director of Information Technology. "That meant we received thousands of phone calls from drivers each day. As the Company's technical team, it was our task to update internal systems to match external growth."

To meet this challenge, Eastern Connection launched a multi-phase upgrade to their delivery systems. The first phase of this project involved arming each driver with a cell phone or PDA equipped with a hand-held scanner. After the delivery was complete, all BOL information was scanned and time stamped, then sent directly to a central delivery server. Using these hand-held devices, drivers were then able to automatically report when packages were loaded onto trucks, when they were dropped at their destination, and who received the package.

Solution Overview

Customer Profile

Eastern Connection is the largest regional provider of express parcel delivery to the Northeast Region.

Service Offerings

Integration, Office Automation

Industry

Regional Courier

Challenge

Integrate Eastern Connection's shipping, tracking and tracing information system, STATIS, with AirClic's message server to facilitate information exchange.

Solution

Greystone designed an AirClic Message Processor to retrieve data from AirClic's server and update STATIS with the relevant data.

Microsoft Software Used

- Microsoft BizTalk Server 2004
- Microsoft Visual Studio .NET
- Microsoft Windows 2003
- Microsoft SQL Server

Benefits

- Automatic data transfers increase efficiency, accuracy and reliability
- Access to centralized information generates an informative view of the big picture
- Web-based interface increases customer service capabilities



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EASTERN CONNECTION CASE STUDY CONTINUED



The hand-held devices ended the tremendous number of driver phone calls into Eastern Connection. However the Company still faced another challenge: getting the delivery server — which stored the updated bar code scans — to communicate with Eastern Connection's shipping, tracking and tracing system, STATIS.

"Although we stopped the flood of phone calls, every delivery still had to be manually reconciled with STATIS," says Villano. "Remember, Eastern Connection handles thousands of packages every day. Reconciling each delivery requires about one minute, so you can imagine the overwhelming amount of time we had to dedicate to data reconciliation."

In addition to being time-intensive, the manual data reconciliation opened the possibility for related drawbacks, including human data entry errors. The time delay to input data also meant that STATIS did not have real-time information for key business decisions, including updating drivers and routes. Finally, the manual system could experience slow-downs due to staffing issues such as employee illness.

Solution

To address their data integration needs, Eastern Connection chose Greystone Solutions, a developer of custom applications based in Boston, MA.

"I've been consistently impressed with Greystone Solutions," says Villano. "Their Consultants know our business as well as our own employees. It doesn't matter if we are discussing service codes or stem rates, Greystone's people understand the inner workings of our operations."

After reviewing the needs of Eastern Connection, Greystone chose to build a web-based system with Microsoft® BizTalk® Server 2004 and Microsoft SQL Server™.

"We wanted a solution capable of handling information from multiple servers over the web," says Greystone CEO Bob Shear. "By combining BizTalk and SQL Server, we could provide real time package tracking without the need for manual data entry."

In just six weeks, Greystone had designed a Message Processor to facilitate information exchange between AirClic and Eastern Connection. After BizTalk receives messages from the delivery server, it stores the information in a SQL Server database and updates STATIS with the latest tracking information. Eastern Connection's employees are then able to view this information in a browser window using Internet Explorer.

"Today our system is lightning-fast. Once a driver hits the finish button, the delivery information is in our STATIS database."

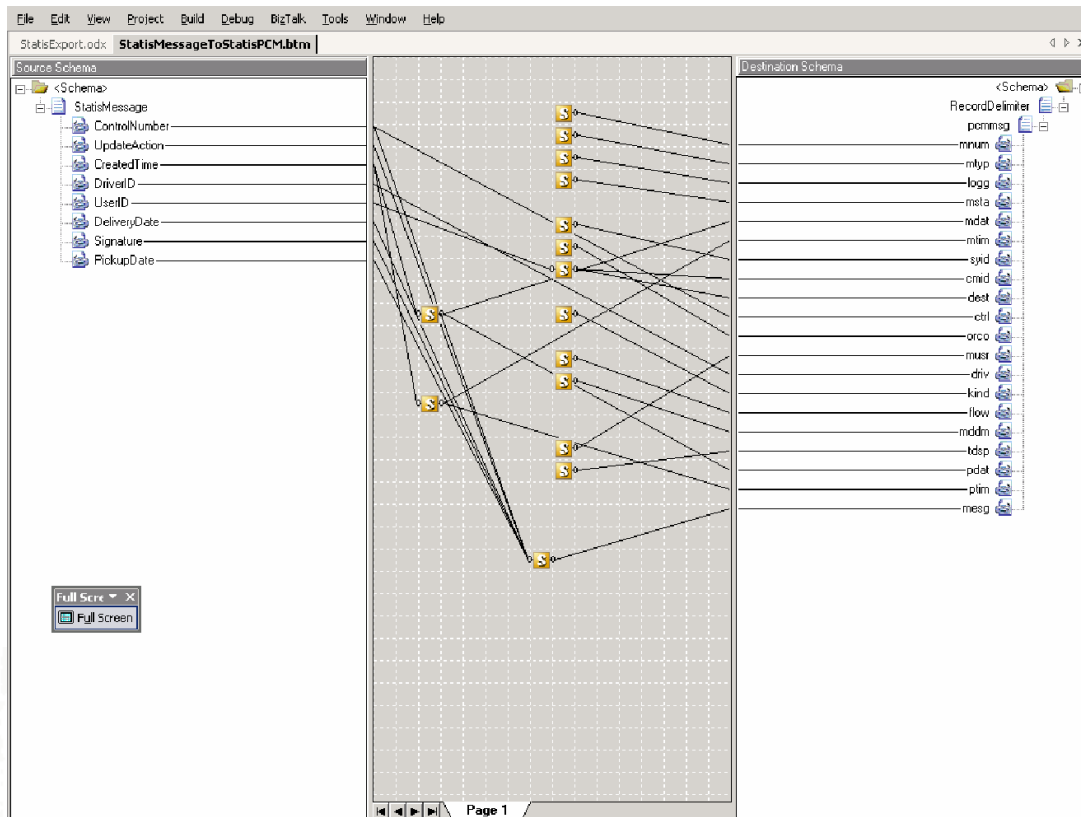
-Dennis Villano
Director of Information
Technology
Eastern Connection



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EASTERN CONNECTION CASE STUDY CONTINUED



One of the greatest benefits of the message processor is the elimination of manual data entry.

In this screen shot, BizTalk matches AirClic's delivery information with records stored in Eastern Connection's STATIS, increasing efficiency, data accuracy and reliability.

"Today our system is lightning-fast," says Villano. "Once a driver hits the finish button, the delivery information is in our STATIS database. Being able to store and analyze that data with the SQL Server is simply invaluable to our business."

Benefits

Automatic data transfers increase efficiency, accuracy, and reliability.

Perhaps the most dramatic improvement of the new Message Processor is enhanced efficiency. Eastern Connection employees no longer have to manually reconcile delivery data from AirClic with their in-house STATIS database. Instead, the Message Processor speeds updated information directly from the field into a centralized data warehouse at the Company's home office.

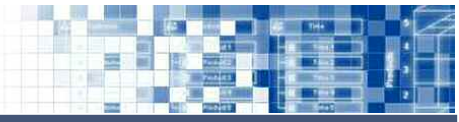
"By removing manual data entry, our Message Processor drastically reduces the amount of time spent on unnecessary paperwork," Says Villano. "We save literally hundreds of hours of data checking each week, a benefit that goes directly to our bottom line."

Eliminating manual data reconciliation causes related benefits as well. The new Message Processor eliminates the possibility of human data entry errors, as well as system slow-downs due to staffing issues.

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EASTERN CONNECTION CASE STUDY CONTINUED



Access to centralized information generates an informative view of the big picture.

The new Message Processor system assists with information analysis as well. STATIS' order information and AirClic's delivery records are easily retrieved from the SQL Server database, allowing data to be searched, manipulated and analyzed using an easy-to-understand interface. The accessibility of this valuable information allows management to view all steps in the delivery chain, giving them the capability to quickly diagnose existing and potential problems.

Web-based interface increases customer service capabilities.

One of the most important benefits of the Message Processor system is its positive impact on the customer experience. Now when a client calls Eastern Connection, there's no question that they're receiving the latest information about when their package was loaded onto the delivery truck, what time the delivery occurred, and who the package was left with. This ability to provide rock-solid shipping information helps Eastern Connection satisfy their customers while strengthening their competitive edge.

Solution Architecture

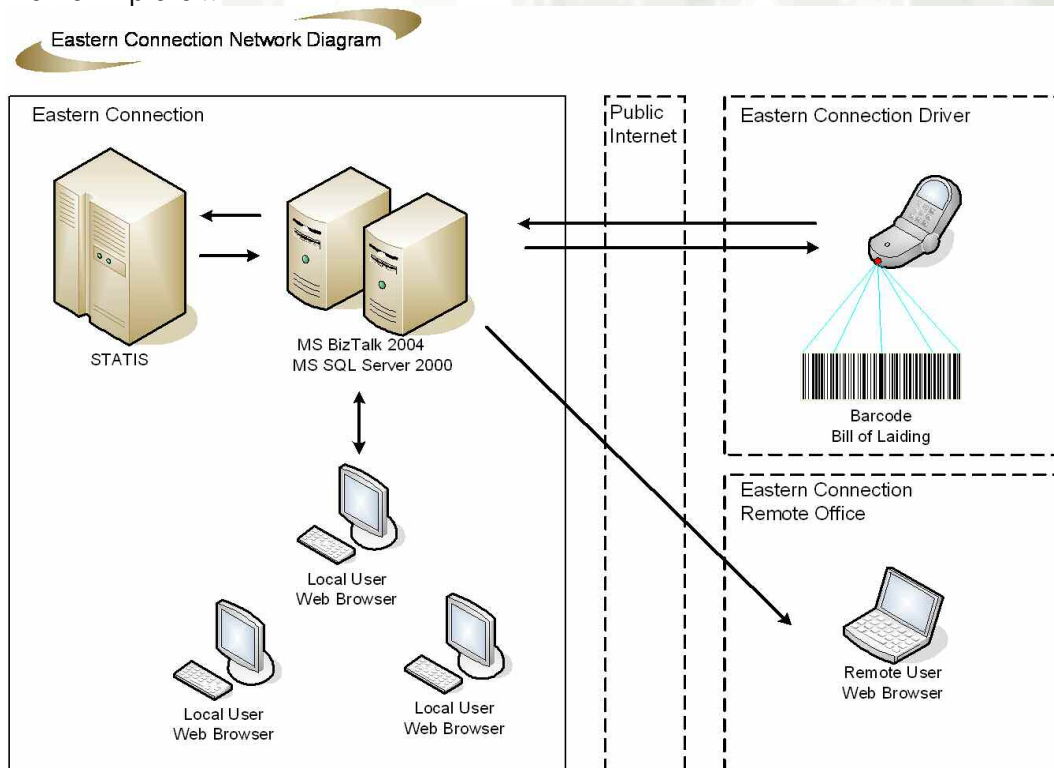
Microsoft® BizTalk® Server 2004 listens to file drops from STATIS and matches them with AirClic's messages as they are received. A web service was used to interface with AirClic's server. All information is then sent to the data warehouse, which was built with Microsoft SQL Server™. The database can be searched by employees at Eastern Connection through Internet Explorer..

For More Information

For more information, please contact us today!

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We look forward to hearing from you and hope you build your next project with Greystone!



This screen capture shows how BizTalk serves as the common link between Eastern Connection's drivers, home offices, and their shipping, tracking and tracing information system, STATIS.

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