

PPG subsidiary LYNX puts Verastream Host Integrator to the test

Service-enables host functionality, streamlines processes for internal and external users



PPG Industries provides products for automotive, construction, chemical processing, and other global industries. With 108 manufacturing facilities and 31,800 employees worldwide, PPG had sales of \$9.5 billion in 2004.

Vehicle windshields have long been a part of PPG. In fact, the company has been producing them ever since windshields started being used. To facilitate the process for windshield repair or replacement, PPG founded LYNX Services, an administrator for insurance companies that work with vehicle owners, collision shops, and auto-glass installers.

Need #1: Improve business processes and user efficiencies

LYNX is one of the leaders in auto-glass claims management, with more than 3,000,000 incidents handled annually. To be effective, LYNX must be able to electronically retrieve information from multiple insurance-company applications residing on 3270 and 5250 mainframe systems. When LYNX service reps began using a software tool that interacted with these character-based applications, they reduced time-consuming manual retrievals of data such as policy number, date of loss, vehicle information, and deductible amount.

However, as insurance company requirements and system needs grew, demands on the interface software grew commensurately. Information Technology Manager Darren Klaum said that LYNX wanted to make the process more efficient and streamlined. "But we were limited by the capabilities of our existing software," he said.

Need #2: Extend legacy functionality to business partners and new users

In addition to meeting the growing needs of their internal users, LYNX wanted to provide claims-processing functionality directly to the

QUICK VIEW

Problem

Client/server system could not web-enable interactions with IBM hosts.

Solution

Used Verastream to extend legacy functionality to web, with no impact to existing mainframes or daily operations.

Results

- A common user interface across the enterprise.
- Shorter training cycles.
- Streamlined access for CSRs and business partners.
- Faster claims processing.
- More efficient use of customer call center.

independent network of auto-glass providers. LYNX chose to use web applications because varying levels of expertise could be accommodated by the intuitive interface.

But once again, LYNX's existing interface software became an obstacle; it used client/server technology and a Visual Basic application deployed to user desktops. This arrangement created a challenge for web deployment.

Finding the right solution

Because all of the host systems were owned and operated by the insurance companies themselves and not LYNX, a non-invasive approach was required. LYNX needed the ability to extend the required functionality with no revisions or other impact to the host-based insurance applications.

As Klaum looked for technologies to meet all the criteria, he contacted leading industry analyst Gartner. Klaum soon discovered that WRQ (now Attachmate) was in the leader section of Gartner's "Magic Quadrant for Integration Servers." He called upon Attachmate and three other companies to demo their host-integration products on site at LYNX, using a client test system. Each vendor was asked to build a live connection and show how their software worked.

Unlike the other products, Attachmate® Verastream® Host Integrator demonstrated remarkable speed and agility, easily fulfilling the LYNX requirements. “We were impressed with Verastream’s ability to make synchronous calls, quickly build Visual Basic 6 DLLs, and get the models deployed,” said John Walker, a systems analyst at LYNX.

The Verastream Host Integrator advantage

Verastream provides an adaptable integration approach by exposing legacy-application data and logic as reusable components or services, and making them available to web applications, CRM applications, and portals. Another deciding factor during the demo, according to Klaum, was the Verastream session pooling, which he knew would reduce logons and eliminate unnecessary user navigation.

“Verastream was clearly the right decision for LYNX,” added Walker. “It was easy to pick up and work with, so we had a very short learning curve.” The IT staff at LYNX used Visual Basic® 6 and ASP to build a web-based front end that makes a call to the Verastream model, which interacts in real time with the insurance-company mainframe housing the policy information.

The high-performance, low-risk choice

Now, with Verastream Host Integrator, LYNX can effectively respond to the expanding requirements of client applications. In addition, external users such as auto-glass retailers can access web applications to quickly verify insurance coverage and get the repair process started. The Verastream solution improved operational efficiency for LYNX, insurance clients, and glass retail shops.

Without the right tools, modifications involving mainframes can be disruptive and risky. That’s why some IT organizations are reluctant to tackle this “last mile” of an integration project. But as Walker pointed out, the Verastream Host Integrator solution required no restructuring of the insurance companies’ mainframe applications and no interruption to daily business operations for LYNX. In fact, Walker said, “Verastream’s non-invasive process was a major reason we chose it. It’s clearly a part of our success in being extremely responsive to an ever-changing industry.”

About Attachmate

Attachmate helps businesses extend, manage, and secure their IT investments. We offer a broad range of solutions—from terminal emulation, legacy integration, and PC lifecycle management products to innovative systems and security management tools. With our technology, more than 40,000 businesses worldwide are putting their IT assets to work in new and meaningful ways. Learn more at www.attachmate.com.

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— John Walker
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