



# FirstMerit Enhances Customer Web Banking and Increases Account Traffic with Scalable Service-Oriented Architecture

Shadow z/Services Distributed Speeds Deployment of Microsoft .NET Framework-Based Applications

## Customer Profile

FirstMerit Corporation is a full service financial services company headquartered in Akron, Ohio, with assets of \$10.3 billion. FirstMerit provides a complete range of banking and financial services to consumers and businesses throughout 160 branch offices in 24 Ohio and Western Pennsylvania counties.

## Understanding the Business Challenge

To provide its customers and staff with superior access to account information, FirstMerit bolstered its IT infrastructure with industry leading technologies. The company developed its original IT infrastructure to support online customer interaction in 2000 and as demand for online account management increased, customer adoption of FirstMerit's online banking services grew exponentially.

The popularity of FirstMerit's efficient account access model created increased Web traffic and the desire to roll-out new services. FirstMerit's management team quickly realized it needed to create flexibility in the IT solution's structure.

FirstMerit's customers were not the only drivers behind IT restructuring. The organization's staff faced an increasing need to gain access to customer records as the number of accounts grew. With an influx of accounts came the challenge of accessing and delivering account information where it was needed as quickly as possible.

Ultimately, the executive team realized it needed a solution with the flexibility inherent in a Service Oriented Architecture (SOA). This new approach would position FirstMerit for further growth and accelerate its ability to deploy innovative customer facing as well as internal banking applications in the future.

## Choosing the Right Solution

FirstMerit quickly identified prerequisites for the new solution: capacity for rapid deployment, technical integration with data and logic on legacy systems, and as little disruption as possible to online and staff-supported workflow. With these requirements in mind, FirstMerit selected NEON Systems' Shadow z/Services Distributed for its innovative distributed runtime option. Based upon the Microsoft .NET framework, 1.1. Shadow z/Services Distributed provides FirstMerit with the ability to withstand heavy traffic loads, due to the increasing use of its online banking service.

Shadow z/Services Distributed also- provides FirstMerit with seamless interoperability between its VSAM databases residing on IBM System 390 mainframes and its distributed Microsoft .NET Framework 1.1 applications running on Microsoft Windows Server 2000 and Microsoft Windows Server 2003. Shadow Developer, a component of the z/Services solution, is fully integrated with Visual Studio .NET 2003 which enabled FirstMerit's .NET Framework-based developers to quickly map and record the 3270 mainframe screen transactions and expose them as Web services to the Microsoft .NET Framework 1.1 application being developed to support the new Internet banking solution.

**"At FirstMerit we have a history of providing our customers with the leading technology to make sure they are able to access their accounts around the globe. The popularity of our online service demands that we employ a scalable solution that meets the current needs of our customer base as well as the future requirements of extended banking services."**

**Jim Giarrano**  
Vice President in charge of client server development

## Realizing the Benefits

Shadow z/Services Distributed seamlessly integrated with FirstMerit's Microsoft Windows Server 2003 and allowed the bank to create Web services without disrupting customer service. The speed of implementation, as well as the reusability of the created Web services, provides FirstMerit with an organic solution that will grow with their future services.



Jim Giarrano, vice president in charge of client server development at FirstMerit, sees the ease of integrating Shadow z/Services Distributed and its benefits to customers as imperative to the banking industry. "The intuitive interface had our developers up and running quickly with minimal backend prep. We have also seen a dramatic improvement to customer Web experience due to improved availability and significantly faster response times."

Following the implementation of the new Web banking system using the Microsoft .NET Framework 1.1 and Shadow/z Services Distributed, customers can now gain access to their accounts in milliseconds and experience a very stable Web environment. As a side benefit to FirstMerit the new system requires less tech support to maintain.

In addition to accessing their account information, FirstMerit customers can now also handle transactions including monetary transfers. Shadow z/Services Distributed also provides feature rich access for internal applications giving FirstMerit's staff increased access to customer records.

Another benefit of Shadow z/Services Distributed is the decrease in the demand on the bank's servers. At any given moment the servers cope with hundreds of transactions that may have crippled the former network. Now, due to Shadow z/Services Distributed, the servers easily adapt to dramatic upswings in account activity and handle them with ease.

Dino Chiesa, product manager of the .NET Developer Product Management Group at Microsoft, has identified the relationship between Shadow z/Services Distributed and the .NET Framework 1.1 as crucial to FirstMerit's installation. "NEON's integration tool allows FirstMerit developers to take advantage of the productivity benefits of developing with the .NET Framework 1.1, without changing the existing mainframe-based application and data stores. The FirstMerit project demonstrates the clear benefits of this combination."

The new SOA structure provides FirstMerit with the business agility that it required as it continues its growth of customer services. FirstMerit now possesses a clear channel between its .NET Framework-based applications and its legacy platforms. After experiencing a rapid return on its investment, FirstMerit is already looking to expand the applications of Shadow z/Services Distributed to future customer services.

With the initial stages of a SOA in place, FirstMerit will be using the combined solution of NEON Systems' Shadow z/Services Distributed and the Microsoft .NET Framework 1.1 to roll-out additional features to the online banking service and to speed the deployment of a new Teller Platform System with improved data retrieval capabilities.

**"We have seen a direct correlation between the installation of Shadow z/Services Distributed and the increased number of customers registering for our service and accessing our site. Based on the success of this implementation we can now plan to offer additional services to our customers within the next year, including online statement and check images."**

**Jim Giarrano**  
Vice President in charge of client server development  
FirstMerit Corporation

### About NEON Systems

NEON Systems, Inc. (Nasdaq:NEON) -- the Mainframe Integration Experts -- is a leading provider of enterprise-class mainframe integration solutions, delivering the only unified mainframe integration platform to support the entire range of requirements for Service-Oriented Architectures (SOA) and Event-Driven Architectures (EDA) -- key requirements to underpin the Real-time Enterprise. NEON's Shadow technology is designed to reduce the complexity of mainframe integration allowing large organizations with significant commitment to mainframe systems to streamline incumbent technologies and lower total cost of ownership. NEON's Shadow z/Services and Shadow z/Events offerings attack the emerging mainframe Web services and real-time mainframe event-driven markets and are unique in their depth and breadth of support for the requirements of such markets. With extensive mainframe integration expertise, NEON is uniquely qualified to solve the complexities of supporting new business initiatives that must integrate with critical mainframe systems. For more information on the Powering the Real-time Enterprise, see our Web site at <http://www.neonsys.com> or call 800-505-NEON.

### NEON Systems, Inc. Corporate Headquarters

14100 Southwest Freeway, Ste 500 • Sugar Land, TX 77478 • Ph: 281.491.4200 • Fax: 281.242.3880

Dallas • Miami • Toronto • Windsor • Tokyo