

HOW BEKINS MAKES PROGRESS



CUSTOMERS DEMAND MORE VISIBILITY

At any one time, the HomeDirectUSA division of The Bekins Company is serving thousands of customers, delivering furniture and other high-end merchandise across North America. Bekins HomeDirectUSA dominates the high-end business-to-consumer delivery market because they are in close touch with their customers' needs. The Bekin's HomeDirectUSA team is constantly innovating and improving their services to meet customer demands.

A recent innovation focused on providing customers with real time information about delivery status using a new system called STARS. In today's environment, customers are no longer comfortable knowing that their merchandise will arrive within a certain timeframe. They want details, every step of the way. STARS will meet this need and vastly improve customer experience for Bekins' customers.

BEKINS®

CHALLENGE

Provide customers, agents, and management with real-time information about delivery status, using STARS

SOLUTION

Progress® DataDirect Connect® for JDBC™ for fast, reliable, real-time access to their DB2 data from anywhere.

BENEFIT

Reduced support and maintenance costs, customized their application for their specific business needs, real-time synchronization of DB2 data on the mainframe

Dan Michaels is a senior architect/developer with Bekins. He and his team have been spearheading an application infrastructure project that will revolutionize the way Bekins serves its clients while also saving the company immeasurable software development and maintenance time and expense.

About 600 Bekins Agents will soon be equipped with handheld devices using the STARS application that will allow them to track the location, status, projected arrival time, and eventual customer receipt of every piece of furniture or merchandise they are delivering—quite literally every step of the way. Bekins agents will connect from their Intermec Handhelds to the central mainframe DB2 databases. Using a new application called Timelok, Bekins management will know how much merchandise each agent is carrying, and the delivery priority of each item. Bekins agents will then be able to schedule their trips in a more organized, time- and space-efficient manner. Their own schedules will be better managed; no more waiting around for a truck to be loaded. And this new application infrastructure allows Bekins customers real-time insight into where their merchandise is, and when they can expect to receive it.

REAL-TIME ACCESS TO DB2 DATA

The key to this ability is *real-time synchronization* of data from the DB2 mainframe to the Intermec handheld devices. Michaels and his team first considered using a middleware synchronization server, but discovered that they couldn't get the automatic updates they needed to make this project truly beneficial. The synchronization server would have also introduced unnecessary complexity into the architecture. Instead of spending additional development time trying to solve their sync server issues, they opted to simplify STARS architecture to allow a direct connection between the handhelds and the DB2 mainframe. To do this, they turned to Progress® DataDirect Connect® for JDBC™. This allowed them to implement the solution more quickly, and it freed up Michaels' development team to add functionality that tailors the STARS project to their customers' needs.

Their maintenance concerns were also solved by switching to a client/server, real-time sync solution. If Bekins had implemented a sync server solution for accessing DB2 mainframe data, they would have had to hire additional support help to maintain this unstable process. As Bekins agents traverse multiple time zones, this would have meant hiring additional technical support staff for up to 20 hours a day.

WHY DATADIRECT CONNECT FOR JDBC?

Dan Michaels and his team tried the DB2 driver from IBM first, but were unable to get the technical support they needed to get it working quickly. Says Michaels, “The advice I would give other companies is to try Progress DataDirect first because we wasted a lot of time trying to get support from the other company, and that made our problems worse. With Progress DataDirect, whenever we had questions or needed help their support group was knowledgeable and able to answer our questions.”

Bekins was already familiar with DataDirect drivers, as they were using the IBM WebSphere application server, which has been distributing DataDirect JDBC drivers since 2000.

When they evaluated DataDirect Connect for JDBC, they discovered an unexpected additional benefit: increased performance. “Our performance was doubled by being able to use your driver as direct connection to our mainframe. And it allowed us to perform real-time updates to our users in the field.”

Michaels imagines many more uses of the new application infrastructure, and considers this only the start to their options for streamlining business processes and creating opportunities for new business from companies that value real-time information. Instead of conforming their business and technical goals to the ability of their software, they were able to determine their own destiny—and save development staff and time in the process.

“If you factor in the development time saved, the support time that will be saved, and the added features we were able to use because of your driver, I would say it was priceless.”

*Dan Michaels
Senior Architect
Bekins HomeDirectUSA*

RETURN ON INVESTMENT? PRICELESS.

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“DataDirect Connect for JDBC has made my personal role and workload much simpler. It is always more difficult when you add more layers to a project, and using this database driver was like removing a layer of complexity to this project. It has also increased our release of code to production because we do not have to create extra code to handle the complexity of the sync-server.”

PROGRESS SOFTWARE

Progress Software Corporation (NASDAQ: PRGS) is a global software company that enables enterprises to be operationally responsive to changing conditions and customer interactions as they occur. Our goal is to enable our customers to capitalize on new opportunities, drive greater efficiencies, and reduce risk. Progress offers a comprehensive portfolio of best-in-class infrastructure software spanning event-driven visibility and real-time response, open integration, data access and integration, and application development and management—all supporting on-premises and SaaS/cloud deployments. Progress maximizes the benefits of operational responsiveness while minimizing IT complexity and total cost of ownership.

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