Soops Powers into New Markets with Cincom Smalltalk™

Soops

About Soops

Netherlands-based Soops is a dynamic software development company founded in 1992. It was the first company in the Netherlands to be fully dedicated to object-oriented technology because its founders believe that this technology best captures the complex and changing needs of organisations working in IT systems.

Its decision to use the Cincom Smalltalk development environment from the outset has been key in the company's ability to seize new business opportunities.

A Springboard for Exponential Growth

With its background in the cash and derivatives markets of Amsterdam, Soops initially specialized in real-time order management and transactions systems, clearing systems and market operator tools. Its solutions included the creation of new systems from scratch and the migration of legacy systems. Its expertise in the latter is extensive, ranging from "big bang" introductions to gradual module-by-module replacements. A managing director at Soops, comments: "We realized early on that Smalltalk is the fastest way to develop, and the more complex the project, the easier it became with Smalltalk."

The turning point came when the company spotted the opportunity to secure business in the fast-growing energy market. "The speed of development when using Smalltalk and the ability to quickly replicate systems, put us in a very strong position to catapult ourselves into this highly lucrative market."

Soops changed its business strategy to focus all of its resources on developing energy exchange systems, and changed its business model to focus on developing applications that can be expanded and transferred into other markets. The company is now one of only a few fully dedicated software development companies for the power-trading market.

Goal: Change the business model and strategic focus to exploit business opportunities in fast-growing markets such as energy trading.

Challenge: Select an application environment that supports:
- The highest productivity
- The most complex requirements
- 100% reliability
- True openness
- Unparalleled scalability
- Reduced time-to-market

Solution: Cincom® VisualWorks®

Results:
- 50% increase in programmer productivity
- 100% success rate for project reliability
- Projects completed eight times faster than industry norms
- Customer expectations are consistently exceeded for delivery, quality and price
- Soops is now the market-leading software development company for the power-trading market

"APX, the Amsterdam Power Exchange, was one of our earliest clients for whom we are a preferred supplier. Since then it's been a challenge for us to meet the huge level of demand in this highly specialized. "The fact that there are only a handful of players in the market with the required expertise in object-oriented technology has enabled us to secure high-profile, international deals far beyond our expectations."

Why Cincom Smalltalk?

Cincom Smalltalk is an object-oriented application platform for creating and maintaining portable, cross-platform business applications. It consists of two environments: Cincom VisualWorks and Cincom® ObjectStudio®.

Soops Eurolight, the company's suite of exchange systems, is a simple, modular and flexible system that needed an equally flexible development environment. Another Managing Director of Soops Investments, comments: "Our objective was to create a multi-market, multi-product architecture that was modular and generic. In order to maximise opportunities, we had to ensure that markets and products could be added or removed without large structural changes to the system. We had no doubt that object-oriented technology, in the form of Cincom VisualWorks, was the only solution that could deliver the required level of malleability and flexibility for the highly complex projects that we were pursuing."

Over the years, Soops has conducted in-depth evaluations of the alternative technologies, in terms of comparative speed of development. "Time and again, the openness of VisualWorks makes it stand out in a market where the vast majority of environments has parts of code that aren't open. If the language is less open and there are errors, the customer will have to depend on the supplier for speed of change. This could result in the market being down for a week, which our clients simply can't afford", said a technical director at Soops.

Developer strategy can no longer be based on brand alone but on performance and the right application for the task. In a climate where there are increasing reports of failed Java and C++ projects, Cincom Smalltalk is viewed by Soops as the most reliable solution. The Managing Director adds: "Java is good for lightweight applications but can't match Smalltalk for productivity and reliability when it comes to complex projects. So far we've achieved a 100% success rate with Smalltalk."

Increased Programmer Productivity

With Cincom Smalltalk, programmers learn the language quicker, solve problems faster and write less code, typically one-third to one-half of the code required of a C++/Java programmer. It has been benchmarked as being more productive than some of the other proprietary environments with an estimated 50% increase in programmer productivity (according to Software Productivity Research, www.spr.com).

A senior engineer at Soops, adds: "The speed of development is so fast that often the client just can't believe that Soops' estimation for completion of a project is realistic. For example, we will know that a particular project will take us no more than three months. But from their industry knowledge, the client would expect this same project to take two years. Sometimes it's hard to convince them otherwise!"

"We were recently appointed to replace all systems for UKPX (formerly the UK Power Exchange) in London and managed to complete the entire replacement, including rebuild and migration from the Swedish system, in just six months. If we weren't using VisualWorks it would have taken nearer three years."

"What's more, the simplicity of Smalltalk means that business analysts can play an active role in developing applications on the fly. This is a highly productive method for software development as it provides a greater chance of getting it right the first time."

Benefits to Soops' customers

Cincom Smalltalk is widely recognized as the best application environment on the market for dynamic change management. Soops' customers have benefited from increased internal productivity, and the scalability of the solution has given them the ability to respond to market changes more rapidly. "The product is set up in a number of modules that cooperate with each other. Each of these modules sits on separate servers so the scalability is purely a hardware not a software issue", said the technical director.

The Future –Next Steps

"In the same way that Cincom Smalltalk makes it easy for our customers to quickly adjust their exchange system in response to market changes, it also allows Soops to rapidly adapt its generic solution to penetrate emerging markets", the managing director said.

"Soops' ability to move swiftly to target both new clients in the energy market and new markets that are in the embryonic stage, such as the bandwidth market, is largely thanks to our decision to use Smalltalk."

In the immediate future, the key area for development is a market coupling system for cross-border trading. The anticipated creation of a single energy market in the European Union, involving twenty-plus countries, will provide a huge expansion opportunity for Soops.

"As with any software development company, our existing library of code, ours being in the field of trading, is at the heart of our expertise. But with Cincom Smalltalk, we have been able to enhance this even further and catapult ourselves into the broader global market."

When VisualWorks first appeared on the market, it was thought that much of its proclaimed benefits were "hype". But it has stood the test of time. The technical director concludes: "Cincom VisualWorks is a highly dynamic solution that lends itself well to current business trends such as globalization and is proving to be the silent force driving IT."

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