

French Software Developer EBC Informatique Goes Global with Cincom Smalltalk™

EBC Informatique

Since 1994, Alsace-based EBC Informatique has developed and offered a new turnkey software package based on the company's TotalHorizon product – an integrated sales management, production management, and accounting solution for small- and medium-sized businesses. Originally established in 1988 as a hardware distributor, EBC Informatique has diversified its business computer services and experienced continuous and rapid growth. The company has nearly 1,000 customers in Alsace alone.

Technological innovation to add customer value is a key element in EBC Informatique's business strategy, part of which is TotalHorizon and partnerships with European and worldwide solution providers such as Cincom. According to the company's chairman, EBC Informatique's strengths can be summarized as its ability to:

- Quickly take ideas and transform them into practical solutions for customers, while maintaining high profitability
- Maximize customer growth through customized technological innovation
- Offer customers a global approach to business IT services

The Project: Extend EBC Informatique's Markets Globally

With its prominent regional profile, EBC Informatique wants to expand throughout France and Europe by building a network of partners with similar business philosophies. Expansion in France has already begun, with partnerships set up in Paris and Lyon. Establishing Pan-European partnerships is also underway. EBC Informatique's relationship with Cincom was essential to these efforts.

"In Cincom, we see a partner who can accompany us in our move towards globalization of the company," said the president of EBC Informatique. "After all, EBC Informatique stands for European Business Computer, and the time has now come to become truly European."

Goal: Continually add value to TotalHorizon to meet customer needs

Challenge: Provide a development environment that:

- Enables the rapid improvement of EBC Informatique's TotalHorizon small- and medium-sized business solution
- Accommodates optimal pricing in this cost-sensitive market
- Results in a solution that can be implemented quickly and easily

Solution: Cincom® ObjectStudio®

Results:

- The Smalltalk-developed TotalHorizon solution enabled EBC Informatique to build a true small-business framework that can be used repeatedly but tailored for each customer's specific needs and situation.
- Smalltalk enabled the integration of workflow automation for buying, making it possible for customers to adapt EBC's TotalHorizon to their own management methods.
- EBC Informatique views Cincom Smalltalk as a partner in globalizing the company.

With Cincom Smalltalk, EBC Informatique quickly enhances and improves TotalHorizon, while maintaining optimal pricing and providing customers with quick implementation. Ongoing prototyping, incorporation of reusable components into the product architecture, and modification of the interface without compromising the overall application are all provided through the development environment of Cincom Smalltalk.

Flexibility for Small and Medium Businesses

EBC Informatique and Cincom share a common view of the trend towards flexible, high-quality architectures. ObjectStudio is thus the natural complement to the company's integrated sales, production and accounting software product. In addition, Cincom offers new distribution, workflow management and internet access capabilities through the Smalltalk development environment, which gives EBC Informatique a strong foundation for future development.

EBC Informatique's TotalHorizon is an integrated solution targeted to commercial sectors with a manufacturing component, such as supermarket suppliers and textile and mail-order companies. The solution is multilingual, multicurrency and multicompany or multibranch. Cincom's long history and direct experience in these specific industries, plus its language and currency transparency, are major factors in its ability to meet the needs of EBC Informatique and its customers.

"For EBC Informatique, Cincom provides an efficient means of quickly enhancing TotalHorizon, as is clearly demonstrated by the initial prototypes we have developed together," according to EBC Informatique project manager.

The project manager said that two essential TotalHorizon features are highlighted when selling the product: innovative technology (PC-based, object-oriented, integrated office automation, etc.), and the EBC Informatique methodology, which guarantees that all expressed needs can be met, combined with the flexibility of a solution built up around a true business framework. This ensures that the product can be offered at the best possible price with quick implementation taking between three and six months. Finally, the solution can easily evolve to keep pace with subsequent changes within the customer's company. All these features are grounded in the Cincom Smalltalk environment used for TotalHorizon development.

Extra Added-Value

Cincom ObjectStudio provides access to the leading commercial RDBMSs and enables the product architecture to be structured around reusable components, making permanent adaptation of the solution simpler for customers. For example, the user interface can be modified without compromising the rest of the application, while other components available from Cincom (Workflow and Distributed Communications FrameWork) can be added with ease.

"Smalltalk and ObjectStudio are ideally suited to management problems and have enabled us to build a true small-business framework which we can reuse and tailor for each new customer context," the project manager said.

Recent Developments

Further increasing TotalHorizon's value to customers, EBC Informatique used the Cincom Smalltalk environment to develop means of integrating workflow automation for buying, making it possible for customers to adapt TotalHorizon to their own management methods. Another project involved integrating Cincom's Distributed Communications FrameWork (DCF) for Java and Smalltalk, and incorporating internet access into the solution to expand e-commerce capabilities. The resulting benefits made TotalHorizon even more attractive to its current and potential customers.

"DCF for Java enabled us to add Internet access capability to TotalHorizon," the project manager recalled. "And DCF for Smalltalk offers greater flexibility when distributing objects between clients and servers, in particular, for creating an application server separate from the presentation layer and the data server. With Cincom, we can now completely separate the various components of the application. Based on our experience with these projects, we can see what 'powered by ObjectStudio' really means."



World Headquarters • Cincinnati, OH USA • US 1-800-224-6266 • info@cincom.com • cincom.com/contact-us

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