

SNAPSHOTS IN PRODUCTIVITY



10 questions with...

Read the compelling stories of IBM System i Professionals and their candid answers to 10 questions on rapid System i - Web Application Development.

Training Masters, Inc.- www.trainingmasters.com

Bob Amell, Director, Information Technology



Training Masters, headquartered in Enola, Pennsylvania, is a training and consulting company that offers products and services designed for career schools, colleges, and other educational institutions and organizations.

Their product STARS (Student Tracking, Accounting, and Records System) is a comprehensive, integrated administrative software solution that is proven and affordable. STARS runs on IBM System i servers.

BCD: **What types of applications have you developed with WebSmart?**

Amell: "We converted and modernized an end-to-end school management green-screen application into one that delivers software as a service (SaaS). Now, small institutions don't have to make a big investment in hardware, software, or other IT related assets. Our solution can also be licensed to run on the school's in-house System i computer."

BCD: **Did WebSmart replace another web development tool?**

Amell: "We licensed Jacada at first, however the problem was that it required additional PCs. Data came across a telnet connection to serve the Jacada page. The PC server had to have a copy of Tomcat, as well as other programs, and you had to configure isapi plug-ins. It was complicated and required lots of effort every time a new system was installed."

BCD: What were the key reasons for selecting WebSmart?

Amell: "WebSmart is well suited to situations where you are delivering SaaS. WebSmart developed applications are stateless so it doesn't get effected by dropped lines because it's an internet web application, unlike a telnet connection."

"In addition, school burglaries have increased. Thieves see schools as easy targets. The item they steal is the computer used by administrators because they want to get at personal information and social security numbers. A hosted solution keeps school administrators from having to worry about any of this because all of this data is kept at a secured and professionally maintained co-location site. Our site adheres to the three P's of Pipe, Power and Protection."

"I've been a BCD ProGen Plus user for years. I like the product and BCD's technical support. In my evaluation of WebSmart I found it to be enormously flexible. It's also a lot easier on our customers."

BCD: Did you study your ROI on WebSmart?

Amell: "I did not do any ROI analysis prior to licensing WebSmart but I can tell you this: *We sold only one copy of STARS when it was Jacada-based and we have sold 10 since it became modernized with WebSmart. I know we recovered our investment very early on.*"

BCD: Did BCD's services group or a BCD business partner do any custom development for you?

Amell: "Mason Computer Consulting did most of the work for us—they're a BCD Business Partner who does a lot with WebSmart and other BCD solutions. Besides consulting, they have developed their own software products using WebSmart."

BCD: What did WebSmart help you do that you might not have been able to do otherwise, and what is your next project?

Amell: "Essentially, we developed an entirely new application over our existing database. We have incorporated lots of advanced features. For example, the calendars in STARS can now be shared between multiple authorized users; we have a dynamic menu management interface, and many of our applications allow users to select a radio button that prints the report they want or exports the data to an Excel spreadsheet."

“Our WebSmart license also includes a snap-in component called SmartCharts. This tool allowed us to build graphically formatted Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that school administrators use to gauge performance. Administrators can create graphs for Leads versus Budget, Revenue versus Expense and other business metrics, instantly. Also, SmartCharts was delivered free with WebSmart.”

“For our next project we will develop a student self-service component. Right now, the system is only accessible by authorized administrators.”

BCD: Has WebSmart allowed your organization to pursue opportunities they may not have otherwise pursued?

Amell: “WebSmart is allowing us to move forward with our business plan. If we can pick up 1% of the private post secondary market we could easily be a 30 million dollar company.”

BCD: Do you license any other BCD modernization solutions?

Amell: “Yes. We have been using ProGen Plus for many years and we’ve been impressed with it too. In fact, all of the reports in STARS were initially created using ProGen Plus when STARS was a green screen application. Now, all these reports are called though WebSmart applications.”

BCD: What kind of positive feedback have you received from customers?

Amell: “Our clients are all very happy. I recently received another letter from one of our clients saying that the query capabilities that are now available have significantly improved his ability to manage his business.”

BCD: If you were to give BCD and WebSmart a grade on a scale of A through F, what grade would you give them, why and would you recommend WebSmart?

Amell: “This is an interesting question given the fact that we are in the education business. I don’t dole out many perfect scores but in this case it’s justified that both BCD and WebSmart get A’s! I would definitely recommend WebSmart to any organization who wants to create new System i web applications or modernize existing applications. WebSmart is very easy to use and the applications we created look very professional and run fast. I have lots of experience with RPG and I found WebSmart quite easy to understand.”