

Snapshots in Productivity

10 questions for...

Read the compelling stories of IBM iSeries Professionals and their candid answers to 10 questions on rapid iSeries - Web Application Development and their experiences. Click on "more »" for the complete Q & A's. A quick read that's worth your time.

Academic Book Services, Inc.- www.academicbookservices.com

Gary Stewart, Director, Information Technology



Academic Book Services, Inc. headquartered in Cartersville, Georgia, furnishes affordable, high quality educational materials to elementary school students throughout the nation. ABS supports one of the country's largest educational book distribution operations with an IBM iSeries model 520.

BCD: Did you evaluate WebSphere or any other competitive products and why did you select WebSmart?

Stewart: "I looked at WebSphere and found it to be both very costly and very complicated. I also looked at Lansca and CA Fusion 2E. I spent seven years with Synon Professional Service and am the author of the Synon Made Simple books, so I have a preference for the Synon or Fusion 2E tool.

I selected WebSmart because of its ease of use and cost, BCD's support, and my comfort level with the tool. I really needed to have a product that non-iSeries and entry-level people could also use. It was the best business decision I could make. WebSmart also gave us more time to focus on the functionality of the business application rather than having to learn the peculiarities of a new language or a complicated tool."

BCD Did you do any proof of concept before you began using WebSmart?

Stewart "We use Daly.commerce ERP system from Infor. We did a proof of concept to see if WebSmart would integrate with it. Daly security did some unusual things but once we figured out how to handle them we got these systems to work together seamlessly."

BCD: What types of applications have you produced with WebSmart?

Stewart: "So far we've designed self-service applications like Online Sales Reporting, Order Invoice Inquiry and a Web Order Entry portal for our customers."

BCD: Was your staff able to quickly come up to speed with WebSmart and develop Web applications?

Stewart: "Yes, using WebSmart has really proven to be a no-brainer for us. We even had a sales analyst, a very non-AS/400 person, write most of the sales reporting module."

BCD: Did you license any other BCD software solutions?

Stewart: "Yes, we also licensed Clover, SmartCharts, Catapult, ProGen Plus, Docu-Mint, and EZ-Pickin's. With Clover, we looked at several other query and reporting tools that cost up to \$70,000 for similar functionality. A big advantage is both WebSmart and Clover share the same IDE. It has the same look and feel... you learn one, you learn them all! As for EZ-Pickin's it alone saved us six weeks of work and it only cost about five hundred dollars! It paid for itself in the first few hours."

BCD: What feedback have you received from your management team on the browser based applications you've developed with WebSmart?

Stewart: "WebSmart is almost too good. Management is flooding us with new ideas for new web applications. They ask since you did this large amount of work in only seven days, can't you just spend another fifteen minutes and do these other thirty things? They are getting more excited about what WebSmart is allowing us to accomplish."

BCD: What are some of your future iSeries web development plans?

Stewart: "We're going to write an RF warehouse inventory application that uses pocket PCs which are very inexpensive. All we'll have to do is display WebSmart screens on these devices.

Development is also going to focus on Executive Dashboards that we'll create with Nexus portal and SmartCharts. Sales Managers will get a portal that lets them click on a state and see all sales by state, by person, by region, and more. Our customers will, soon, be able to place orders and look at their order history and accounts receivable.... If a book wasn't in stock when they placed an order and then later comes in, the new system will send them an email. We'll use Clover to drive real time web reporting functionality."

BCD: **If someone called you for a reference on WebSmart, would you recommend it? What benefits would you mention?**

Stewart: "Yes I would. If they have an iSeries RPG background they'll like it because, among other things, lots of the commands are RPG developer friendly. If they have a Microsoft or Visual Basic background they'll like the WYSIWYG and the integrated / dynamic database capabilities. If they're coming from a quality control background they'll like the way they can easily perform tests on new work. And if they're coming from a management background they'll like the way they can focus on business issues and timeliness of turnaround."

BCD: **What is your experience with BCD's technical support staff?**

Stewart: "BCD hires very professional support people. On a scale of one to ten I give their support team an eleven. They have been very responsive. Even the sales people understand the technical products and that's a miracle in itself!"

BCD: **If you gave BCD a grade on WebSmart what would it be?**

Stewart: "A typical grading scale ranges from zero to four points unless it's an advanced placement class where the scale spans to five points. I would give BCD and WebSmart a 5.0 -- they are definitely in the advanced placement realm of software tools."



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