The Dawning of a New Age with BUI Apps at EMQUE

F or nearly 10 years, EMQUE Consultants, Inc., a developer of a custom fully-integrated suite of Visual PRO/5® powered applications for the commercial construction industry, dreamed about running their application on a reliable and easy-to-use mobile device. The timing just wasn't right.

Then, earlier this year, it happened. All the stars aligned. First, Apple rocked the world with the release of their iPad, the first widely popular tablet computer; then BASIS blew open the development doors with their Browser User Interface (BUI). EMQUE Consultants Inc. finally reached the point where they could give their application a fresh look.

The Dream Comes True

"We've seen all the planets align in the harmonic convergence. Perhaps that was the age of Aquarius, but this technological convergence is clearly the age of the BUI app!" says Mike Quagliarello, President and Chief Architect of EMQUE Consultants, Inc. "When I read the BASIS Marketing Communiqué announcing BUI, we paid close attention to the 'running in the browser' feature and just waited in the wings for BASIS to release 10.0 so we could get our hands on it. We dove right into the nightly build and now keep up with the daily BASIS developments and fixes."

EMQUE's first suite of programs, "The Foreman," announced on September 21, 2010, is an add-on application to their existing software solutions. In the 45 days since that announcement (tinyurl.com/3y88dme), EMQUE has three installations, with another two scheduled in the coming weeks. Using this app, a job foreman can write quotes, place orders, check inventory, enter payroll data, etc. on the spot, directly from the field, for immediate uploading to the main office. The Foreman is more than just a pretty face, more than an easy button; it addresses the paperwork monster that is a nightmare to control in the construction industry.

Using the Dragon Dictation (www.dragonmobileapps.com) "turns talk into text" application, job foremen can opt to work hands free by just talking into the device and/or copying and pasting dictated text right into the app. "And my hero, Jim Douglas, wrote a signature capture feature that makes it jaw dropping when people see it. Not only can people 'talk' to their iPad into a work ticket, but customers can sign the ticket on the iPad and immediately e-mail it back to the customer, all automagically on iPad!" Quagliarello continues, "This stuff really works...it's not just cool looking!" Future applications will run on smart phones such as Android and iPhone as well as iPad-type tablets. >>

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By Susan Darling
Technical/Marketing Writer

A Look Back

Quagliarello explained that their mobile device focus was on iPad and heeded early advice from Dr. Kevin King, BASIS President and CIO, to process as much as possible on the server and then push to the device. "To get to the final working application, we had to rethink our Visual PRO/5 architectured application model. And working in a new environment along with BBj® had some challenges. The thing that really kept us going was the support from BASIS. Their engineers, particularly Adam Hawthorne and Jim Douglas, worked closely with us to modify our module for iPad. Mike Hack, our software engineer, and I were grateful for their advice and guidance."

As EMQUE pioneered the first conversion to BUI, there are some tips they learned that might be of value to the next group of developers to follow in their footsteps. Grid representation has a ways to go on iPad so they avoided grids wherever possible. Also, iPad doesn't support listboxes yet so EMQUE reworked their app to use listbuttons. Quagliarello explained, "Jim Douglas did something really special with the listbutton. He made it so fast that even if it contains 20K items, the whole screen loads in 20 seconds! No back and forth to/from the server. I don't understand how he did it but it works! Again, Jim is my hero." And as mentioned earlier, it is most efficient to process as much of the app as possible on the server first, then push to the device to avoid going back and forth between the client and server.

A Look Beyond

To compliment The Foreman, EMQUE also created a similar custom BUI app called "The Owner." This suite, designed for an owner, provides a snap shot of cash flow, receivables, aging, customers and sends statements via e-mail. Quagliarello shared that his first 'owner' installation has been busy running around Manhattan visiting all his job sites with iPad in hand, making great strides in his iPad proficiency. The customer said that he can normally fumble through the app in the office but EMQUE made it simplistic for him or anyone to run on a tablet. In fact, this customer had just sent an e-mail from London saying 'ya, know, I've been checking on my jobs and noticed that 3G is really a lot faster here in England than in NY!' Have iPad, will travel...and owners can keep tabs on their companies from any corner of the world.

A Look Ahead

From an application standpoint, EMQUE wants to run their entire application in the browser with the look of a Web page, yet still function the way clients expect. "We still have things to do first, and iPad and BUI aren't quite ready yet either, but hopefully we can move in that direction next year." From a marketing standpoint, Quagliarello is positioning a few very key clients to use the new technology and leveraging them to entice other customers and eventually new clients. "Mobile devices, especially iPad, are culturally ahead of their time for many of my customers. That is the biggest challenge but soon that will change. I see potential for springboarding into iPad applications outside of our current construction market...the whole world has opened up to us now."

In these economic times, EMQUE, and perhaps their own customers, continue to wisely evaluate the vendors with whom they choose to do business. Considerations such as "is this the best vendor to partner with?" and "will this company still be around in 5 years?" are valuable in analyzing current business relationships. EMQUE is certain this move to BUI has, in fact, secured their place in the market and extended confidence to their customers of EMQUE'S own future. Quagliarello explains, "we have squashed any concerns customers might have had about EMQUE flattening out or dying in the future. We have stunned a number of people with what we are able to do with BUI." ∎

EMQUE Consultants, Inc. develops and custom designs, for commercial construction contractors, a fully integrated suite of applications employing best industry practices. Perfect Project, EMQUE's name for the created systems, highlights its seamless integration into an office automation suite. A Perfect Project installation makes financial analysis of business operations a breeze, helping customers know when they are profitable and empowering them to make better financial decisions.

Mike Quagliarello, founder of EMQUE, is President and Chief Architect.

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