



## PARTNERS IN GUI

**By Elizabeth Barnett**

Accu-Med Services Inc. has partnered with BASIS, VLS Consulting and SCS Consulting Inc. to give its character-based application a GUI facelift. The migration and modernization are aimed at attracting new customers in Accu-Med's market of long-term healthcare.

"Technology is slow to catch on in the long-term care industry, but graphical user interfaces have caught on," says Ralph Lockhart, Executive Vice President of Operations for Accu-Med Services Inc., providers of information systems for skilled nursing facilities, and retirement and assisted living communities.

"Almost everyone looking at new software wants a GUI look," he explains. "About two years ago, people started saying, 'We really want to purchase a Windows product.' Even though we know it is not necessarily true, the perception in the marketplace is that GUI is better, faster and more modern. New customers don't want to buy character-based applications if they can help it. They look at character-based applications as antiquated."

Because of this fact, Accu-Med started looking at ways to add a GUI front end on the ADD•ON product line. Early on, Ralph sought help, knowing that Accu-Med would need to migrate an entire product line in a fairly short time frame. "It's a huge undertaking," he says, "but this is what we'll be selling for at least the next 24 months. Our selling strategy, up to now, has been that even though it is character-based, our product has more functionality than our competition's. Now, we can capitalize on industry-leading functionality and a modern look and feel. We are excited about the sales potential that GUI brings us."



To complete the project in the required time frame, he turned to a partnership comprised of BASIS, SCS Consulting and VLS Consulting. "Together, we think we have a very capable team," Ralph says. "We are grateful for the assistance of Sam Vulopas, of VLS Consulting, who is helping on many of the GUI look and feel issues and to our own technical staff, who have reviewed the technical plan and contributed greatly. SCS is working very hard to help us meet a tight development time frame."

The team has just completed the design phase and is in the work phase of migrating the code. SCS is using specialized tools it has developed to automate the migration as much as possible. Once the coding phase is complete, SCS will do unit testing. Then, the modules go to quality assurance testing and documentation. Accu-Med hopes to have a product release in the late fall or early winter of this year.

Another part of the company's sales strategy is to begin by targeting new customers with the GUI offering and develop a base for the new product before tackling migration of over 1,400 existing customers' systems. This will allow Accu-Med to work with a smaller installed base

of new customers to iron out usability and interface issues before tackling the increased support load associated with a major new revision. On the horizon is the potential BBj™ brings.

"We are interested in following the progress of BBj," Ralph says. "If BASIS is able to deliver on its BBj promises, we may look at ways to extend the functionality of the product line with BBj applets. We anticipate that we would start small to gain experience with the new development tool."

Ralph cites an example of how Accu-Med envisions starting to use BBj. Employees at the geographically dispersed nursing homes could access a BBj program through a Web browser to enter resident admissions, room changes and discharges that update the corporate server.

But right now, Ralph says, the crying need is GUI. And partnering with BASIS, SCS Consulting and VLS Consulting, Accu-Med is meeting that need.