Poised for the future with Caché

InterSystems object database Caché has made the all-in agribusiness solution by Swiss CBT Software AG viable for the future. At the same time, the company has created a platform for the fruit and vegetable trade that also works with InterSystems Ensemble, a powerful business integration platform.

When August Wick, owner and CEO of CBT Software AG, made his start in the software business in the mid-1980s, he was responding to an acute need. Trained in agriculture as well as business, and the head of an agricultural accounting and tax firm, he recognized that there was no comprehensive software solution for the specific needs of agribusiness available on the market. In order to fill this gap, Wick hired a team of committed IT specialists and began to develop an industry-specific solution.

CBT Software has grown to a full-service IT service provider with a staff of 14. The company’s business applications have long become the de facto industry standard. CBT Software’s flagship applications are agris® quattro and artos® quattro: comprehensive and fully integrated solutions for the entire agricultural industry, including farms, industry, administration, as well as accounting and tax firms. Featuring a modular structure, the applications cover all the operational procedures efficiently and reliably, from address management, service performance tracking, and order processing, to bookkeeping as well as VAT and payroll accounting. Most of the modules can be used individually as well.
The challenge of a database changeover
After CBT Software had systematically developed its industry solutions for almost a quarter of a century, they were slowly but surely reaching their performance limits. The reason was that the 4-GL database solution was no longer up to date and was no longer capable of fully satisfying user requirements. “Small businesses still make up the majority of our customers. Up until a few years ago, they used just one or two computers each, but now, some use several dozen,” August Wick explains. Over the long term, the legacy database system was unable to handle the increasing mounts of data resulting from the larger group of workstations. Wick looked for a suitable alternative. The most important requirements were high performance and scalability. In addition, the solution was expected to work in very small businesses as well as in larger industrial companies.

Putting business software into overdrive
An initial rough-cut evaluation was less than promising. Wick says, “Most of the database products we examined were too cumbersome, and considering the small size of our customers, they were much too expensive as well.” Wick ran across the InterSystems object database Caché more or less by chance and was convinced it was suitable right away. “It very quickly became clear that Caché can handle large amounts of complex information much better than relational databases thanks to its object technology and the efficient multidimensional data engine.” Wick was also impressed by the flexibility of the InterSystems database: “Because Caché generally allows software developers to select any development tools, programming languages, and data access models, applications can be created rapidly and expeditiously.” Another reason for Wick to decide on Caché was the supplier’s extensive experience: “InterSystems has had Caché on the market for more than 15 years. That is why we could be sure that Caché has a solid and widely tested architecture. We also liked InterSystems’ transparent and customer-focused business policy.”
Faster and more powerful thanks to Caché
Following an extensive testing phase, Wick decided to implement Caché for his entire range of products. In the meantime, most of the business software’s more than 15 modules have been ported to the InterSystems database. “Because Caché features extraordinarily high throughput rates, our industry solutions have become many times faster and more powerful,” says Wick, adding, “thanks to the database’s high degree of scalability, there are no longer any limitations regarding data volume or the number of users – and no loss in performance whatsoever.” Another plus, particularly for the smaller businesses using CBT software, is that as a rule Caché-based applications require less expensive hardware than ones created with traditional relational databases. In addition, thanks to Cache’s numerous reliability features such as shadowing and clustering, CBT software can guarantee interruption-free operation of business-critical applications as well as maximum data security. In summary, August Wick says, “our software solutions are poised for the future because of Caché.”

Caché is the core element of industry solutions
Today, Caché is not only a core element in the industry solutions agris® quattro und artos® quattro, but is also used in other projects. For example, CBT Software developed a web-based procurement and dispatch platform for the fruit and vegetable trade. The client was Allianz Ost Gemüse AG, a group of vegetable producers supplying Coop, the second-largest retailer in Switzerland. The application was developed using Ensemble, the powerful InterSystems business integration platform.

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Process chart of the agris® quattro business platform
New platform optimizes the entire supply chain

Fourteen producers are connected directly and additional suppliers indirectly to Allianz Ost Gemüse AG’s web platform, covering all processes along the supply chain. For example, producers can enter the goods they can supply into the system on a daily basis. The system in turn picks up Coop’s orders and distributes them to the individual producers within a few seconds according to a predefined allocation formula. Then the system optimizes distribution and transport. As soon as Allianz Ost Gemüse’s dispatcher has checked and approved the orders, all the packing slips and labels for the pallets are created automatically and made available to the producers via the Internet for download or printing. The DESADV (“despatch advice message”) is sent to Coop, and all Coop distribution centers receive fully automated e-mails with the individual producers’ packing slips, the overall packing slips, the container documents, and a list of differences between orders and deliveries should they occur. With just a few mouse clicks, the dispatcher can now see in a timely manner what each individual producer offers, without having to assemble the data tediously. There is a paperless billing system both for Coop and the producers; communication with Coop is based on AS-2 and EDIFACT.

Efficient development thanks also to support by InterSystems

CBT Software and Allianz Ost Gemüse AG had agreed on a tight schedule for developing the complex platform: less than seven months between awarding the contract and the system going live. Wick considers close cooperation with InterSystems an important factor for meeting this completion deadline. “We were able to rely on the specialists at InterSystems providing competent support and could even involve them in the project on site as needed. That allowed us to press ahead with development so efficiently.”

The solution has been operating very successfully for two years and has delivered significant benefits. The entire supply chain was optimized, as was coordination of the vegetable producers’ cultivation and product range planning, and as a result, the amount of vegetables on the market that were sourced from Switzerland was increased substantially in relation to imported vegetables. Cost savings were achieved in terms of the platform as well as personnel, which is of key importance given the massive pressure on prices in the vegetable sector. Thanks to the system’s trouble-free and efficient operation, it was possible to gain Allianz Mitte Gemüse AG as a customer a year ago, and the solution’s processing/dispatching features were considerably expanded.

With agris® agrofresh, CBT Software AG is now in a position to supply an end-to-end solution covering all business processes “from the field to the store.”

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