IBM Innovation Center helps AquiTec deliver confidence with trusted supply chain solutions on IBM Express Runtime and Linux on POWER

Overview

The Challenge

With an eye on the SMB marketplace, AquiTec wanted to integrate their new solution suite with IBM Express Runtime and enable it on multiple IBM hardware platforms.

The Solution

The resources available through the IBM Innovation Center in Hursley, UK.

The Benefit

AquiTec's solution has been tested and proven to be enabled for IBM platforms, earned IBM technical validations, and been successfully implemented for a key customer.

"We have never, ever failed to deliver!"

If you go to aquitec.co.uk, you'll find that statement displayed proudly – because high quality delivery is what it's all about for AquiTec.

A leading supply chain software developer and provider, AquiTec was a pioneer of warehouse management systems in the late 1960s. They've established a proven track record with more than 30 years of integrating people and processes and enabling technologies to provide supply chain solutions for the retail and wholesale and distribution industries.

Today, AquiTec continues to lead the way in the era of digital supply chain management (SCM) with a new suite of solutions that encompass procurement,

forecasting, warehouse management, voice direction, labor management and Web ordering. At every step in the design and implementation processes, their goal is to help companies reduce supply chain costs and improve management and control of inventory.

Trusted solutions

With worldwide offices in Bagshot and Nottingham, UK, and Chicago, Illinois, AquiTec's solutions are deployed in 14 countries around the world in multiple languages.

"Knowing that we can deliver a trusted solution with validation and support from IBM builds that confidence and provides our customers with the certainty they need to run the business."

Bruce Putman,
general manager,
AquiTec

AquiTec's SCM Warehouse™ solution is a sophisticated, platform and database independent warehouse management system (WMS) that supports complex distribution operations, including the control and management of inventory, stock levels, stock mix and availability, customer service levels, the optimization of space, and management information.

With SCM Procurement, buyers and management have the ability to control the purchasing function to increase productivity. The system is designed to allow an organization to operate with the least amount of inventory, while maintaining management mandated service level goals. The system helps the buyer determine when to place an order and how much to order.

The SCM Billing tool provides the ability to receive and process customer orders, adjust orders, release orders to the WMS, apply taxes, invoice the orders, debit or credit the stores' invoices, review and refine the daily picking and transportation plans and adjust any costing or pricing errors post-invoicing.

The AquiTec solution suite runs on the Red Hat Enterprise Linux operating system and is enabled on the IBM System x™ and IBM System p™ Linux® on POWER™ servers in an IBM Express Runtime environment.

Entering the SMB marketplace

"Where we previously targeted large enterprises, we've developed our newest product with an eye on the SMB marketplace," said Bruce Putman, general manager of AquiTec. "To address that market, we've concentrated on being not just highly functional, but also cost-effective. That's one of the reasons why we felt IBM Express Runtime would be an ideal environment for our new

SCM suite and the System x an ideal hardware platform. The System p is also important, for its scalability and ability to achieve optimal performance for Linux."

IBM Express Runtime is an integrated, extendable platform stack that includes a database server, application server, and Web server. Built to get business applications up and running quickly, it gives software developers like AquiTec the ability to deliver everything required to run and manage a business application to their customers with one purchase, one installation, one license, one administration console, and one support structure. AquiTec's implementation uses DB2® Express, WebSphere® Application Server Express, IBM HTTP Server, and the Express Runtime console.

"The confidence that our customers have in IBM hardware and software complements the 'best of breed' functionality that we provide to offer the best, most complete solutions," Putman said. "When we can say that we support the IBM platform, it gives us more credibility in front of our customers."

"We have a reputation for quick delivery of quality solutions," he continued. "Our customers' systems

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are 'mission critical' and cannot afford down-time or inaccuracies. 'Bugs' in a system can bring warehouse operations to a halt, so we cannot afford to ruin a 30-year reputation by being less than perfect."

Meeting the challenge

As a small company, the combination of their limited resources and aim for perfection made enabling their new solution suite with IBM Express Runtime and on the Linux on POWER platforms a challenge that AquiTec was not sure they could meet on their own. The enablement was important not only for their long-term goals, but also, more immediately, to meet the requirements for implementing the first installation of the new SCM suite at Lloyd Fraser, one of AquiTec's key customers and a provider of third party logistics solutions through complex warehousing and distribution networks across the UK.

AquiTec is an Advanced level member of IBM PartnerWorld® and participates in the PartnerWorld Wholesale Industry Network. Their PartnerWorld membership gives AquiTec access to a wide variety of resources for both technical and marketing and sales support. It also means that AquiTec did not have to face their enablement challenges alone.

"Our IBM ISV client manager was aware of our situation and suggested we take advantage of the support offered through the IBM Innovation Center in Hursley," Putman said.

IBM Innovation Centers, with more than 30 locations throughout the world, give IBM Business Partners access to in-depth IBM skills and cross-platform test environments, to help with the design, implementation, porting and testing of their applications. The Hursley center is located in the UK,

within traveling distance of AquiTec's offices there.

AquiTec's IBM ISV client manager introduced them to an IBM Business Partner technology manager who worked with them to understand their requirements and issues and arranged for an engagement at the Hursley center.

A consultative approach

"The staff at the IBM Innovation Center in Hursley were outstanding," said Putman. "I was particularly impressed with how they take a consultative approach with the assistance they provide."

"Along with on-site access to the systems we needed and assistance with the rigorous testing that was required, they gave us invaluable guidance and advice for improvement," he described. "They not only shared their own knowledge and expertise with us, they even arranged for us to speak with the IBM product manager for Express Runtime who provided additional assistance and an offer for direct support."

AquiTec's port to the Linux on POWER platform was achieved using IBM Systems Application Advantage for Linux – also known as "Chiphopper™" -- an offering for IBM Business Partners that is designed to assist ISVs in porting, testing, and supporting their existing Linux x86 applications on Intel® to IBM Systems and middleware platforms. It's called Chiphopper because of its capability for allowing applications to easily move, or "hop," across various chips. The Ready for IBM Systems with Linux mark AquiTec received after their successful port shows their customers that their solution is credited by IBM as enabled for Linux on IBM Systems.

In addition, as a result of the testing at the Hursley center, AquiTec has earned technical validation through the IBM System Storage Proven program on the DS8000™ Series enterprise level storage system. The System Storage Proven mark represents solutions that have successfully completed interoperability requirements with System Storage products and have obtained IBM confirmation.

"As we launch our new product suite, we want to be able to tell our customers that we have market leading applications with great functionality, and we want to be able to prove that the applications are open and portable and will run on any platform they ask for," said Putman. "When we can reference the Chiphopper program and our validations, it gives our customers confidence that that our product will run properly on their IBM system."

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A satisfied customer

SCM Warehouse has now been successfully installed at Lloyd Fraser's new warehouse operation in Rugby, UK, where they're already benefiting from the service differentiation they've attained by using the browser-based capabilities of AquiTec's solution to drive closer collaboration with their customers.

AquiTec's reputation for quick delivery and high quality is intact, as they've delivered on their commitment to another satisfied customer.

Continued support

AquiTec's port to the System x and System p platforms went so smoothly, they're now planning to use the resources at the Hursley IBM Innovation Center to do the same for the System i™.

To extend their capabilities even further, the AquiTec developers are working on additional integration projects with the staff at Hursley.

They're integrating the SCM solution with IBM Store Integration Framework, which will enable consistent use of customers' existing and new point-of-sale systems and store management tools and processes.

Plus, their work to integrate with WebSphere RFID Premises Server will make AquiTec's solution RFID printer ready and ultimately make the entire supply chain process more efficient and cost effective. RFID (radio frequency identification) uses specially printed tags to enable the tracking of materials and integration of the end-to-end supply chain. Being RFID printer ready will give AquiTec the capability to create the RFID tags on IBM RFID printers.

Finally – for now – the two teams are working to enable innovative customer business process automation with WebSphere Process Server and qualify AquiTec for the IBM Business Partner SOA Specialty. This specialty will show that their solution uses a service oriented architecture approach and is compatible with IBM SOA Foundation products.

"Our lead technical consultant at the Hursley IBM Innovation Center has been absolutely super in guiding us on the technical side and working with us on our various integration and enablement projects – but he hasn't stopped there." said Putman, "He has also helped us understand so much more that IBM has to offer its Business Partners." That includes the marketing and sales benefits available to Advanced level PartnerWorld Industry Networks participants.

Plans are already under way for AquiTec to use the industry networks' client events package to hold their global users group meeting at the IBM Innovation Center near AquiTec's offices in Chicago, Illinois, in the fall of 2007. IBM will host the meeting, provide the facilities and catering, assist with the logistical details, and help with the presentations and demonstrations.

"IBM is helping us in so many areas," Putman said, "from the 'speed-to-market' technical resources like the IBM Innovation Centers to the 'go-to-market' marketing and sales benefits. The support is astounding."

High quality delivery is everything

"Today, high quality delivery is everything and the more confidence our customers have that they can depend on us to deliver what we promise when we promise it, the better," Putman concluded. "Knowing that we can deliver a trusted solution with validation and support from IBM builds that confidence and provides our customers with the certainty they need to run the business – and that's what it's all about for AquiTec."

Learn more

For more information about AquiTec Limited, visit their Web site at aquitec.co.uk

To find out more about how the IBM Innovation Centers can help you design, implement, port and test your applications visit **ibm**.com/partnerworld/iic.

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