

Compass Group Completes Planning Circle with RCP

Food services is a difficult industry in any market. With razor-thin margins and large work forces in many locations, careful cost management and forecasting are vital. Compass Group Southern Africa had the additional challenges of working with operations in remote communities throughout South Africa, often with limited telephone and network connectivity.

When Compass approached Jigsaw Interactive (www.ji.co.za/), they needed a business management solution that would help them manage operations in over 700 sites, employing over 7000 people. Knowing that their needs would grow and change, they chose to develop the SmartBase business application platform to which they could easily add applications as needed. Managers in remote locations had to be able to use SmartBase applications offline, and then dial in to update the company's central accounting system.

Jigsaw was tasked to develop SmartBase and to create the first application for the platform - the Integrated Results System (IRS) - a tailor-made yet cost-effective budgeting and forecasting application that had to be up and running in three months.

With these tasks in hand, Jigsaw explored the options available. Eclipse RCP had all the attributes we needed to support Compass Group, including cross-platform support, a RAD environment, a robust update mechanism, and support for offline operation.

Dividing and Conquering with Plug-ins

"The system is maintenance free, requiring little support and intervention. New applications are deployed via Update Manager, allowing for quick and painless deployment."



The Eclipse IDE proved to be an excellent environment for rapid application development. However, the component model was critical to our success. Jigsaw made extensive use of plug-ins to deliver functional pieces of the IRS application. Jigsaw's development team was freed

from writing common infrastructure functionality, such as a UI model, dynamic discovery, plug-in management, navigation models and update management. They were able to focus on their areas of expertise, writing modules that focused on solving Compass Group's business problems. These productivity gains allowed us to shave valuable time off the development schedule.

Component extension hooks also made it easy to update only the components that require updating. Since bandwidth is an expensive commodity in South Africa, selective control was vital.

The Best Support is Invisible to the User

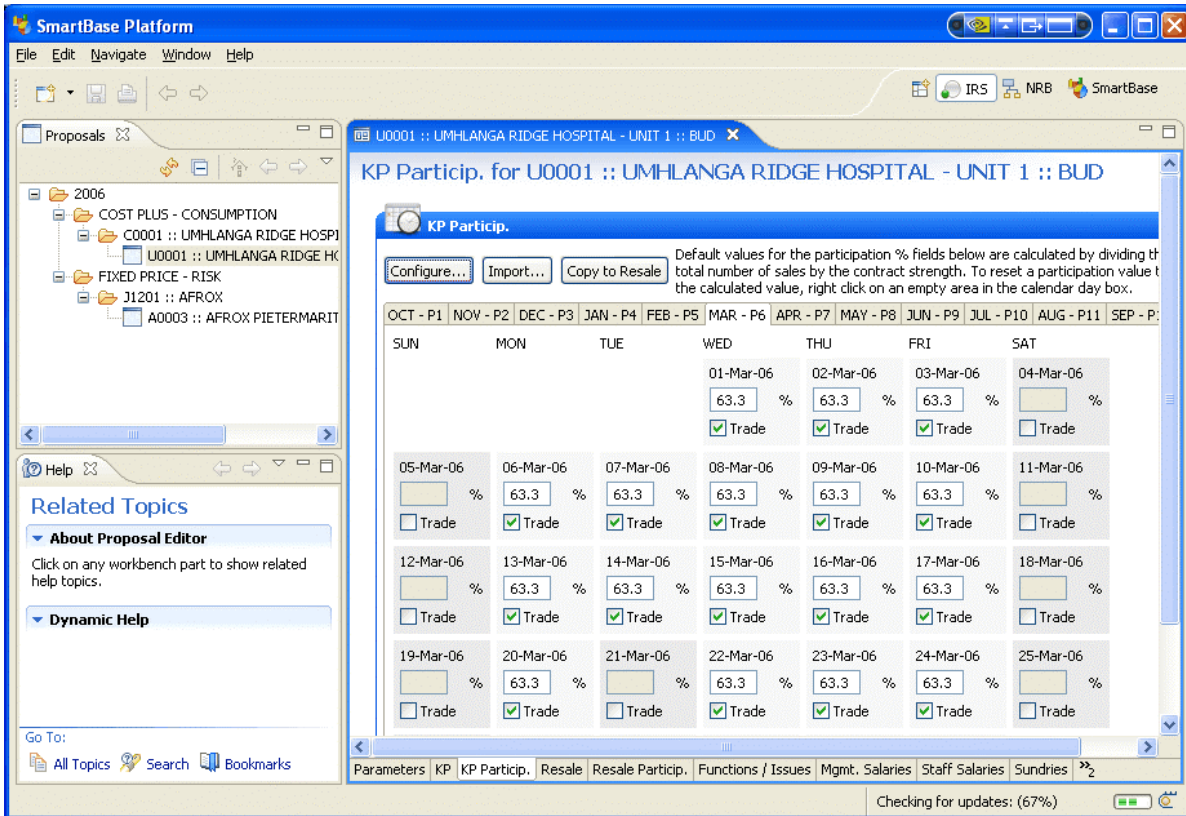
Jigsaw's development teams can support Compass's remote users seamlessly. They simply publish plug-ins to an update site that the IRS application checks at start-up. Any updates are downloaded and installed without user

intervention. The Update Manager has worked flawlessly for Compass during some very busy times of their fiscal year. According to Maurice Nagan, IT Facilities Manager for Compass, “The system is maintenance free, allowing quick and painless deployment and updates”.

Faced with limited bandwidth, running thin-clients over long distance POTS would have been expensive and slow. Offline operation was a vital requirement. By embedding the HSQLDB database in an RCP thick client, remote managers

A Solid Foundation for Growth

The deployment of SmartBase/IRS has been a great success to date, empowering and making managers responsible for their business units. Alan Banister, Group Information Director at Compass is so impressed that he plans to incorporate all of Compass’s front-end business applications on the platform. At Jigsaw, they will expand their use of Eclipse technologies, making use of ECF and BIRT to deliver a well-organized, collaborative platform for Compass’s business



The Integrated Results System, built on the SmartBase business platform, empowers managers located throughout South Africa to budget, plan, forecast and share data with Compass Group’s Head Office in Johannesburg.

have a complete desktop solution that they can use any time, connecting to Compass Group’s SSA Infinium accounting system via modem. Using the Eclipse Import/Export wizard API, we provided even more flexibility for managers to email budgets to their supervisors for review.

software needs.

Ron Stone is a technology writer and content management consultant based in Ottawa, Canada.