

LA County jail system cuts in-house crime

In addition to keeping track of more than 20,000 inmates who are awaiting trial, arraignment, or otherwise detained, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department is charged with managing the millions of dollars these inmates bring into the system. Using hard currency as the means of exchange fosters inmate crimes including extortion, buying contraband from outside the jail, and theft. In early 1995, a Cashiering and Jail Store System (CJSS), initiated by a team of developers from Integra Technology International Inc., eliminated cash transactions within the system and, in the process, cut down on crime.

Previously, the inmates imprisoned within a network of 10 jail locations throughout Southern California were allowed to carry up to \$40 to buy food and supplies. Inventory of goods was not automated, the cash register-based system was inaccurate, and if the power went down, each register would need to be reconfigured. Now, the system is debit and credit based and each transaction is tracked through a bar-code system and triggered by the new wrist bands worn by all inmates.

The entire customer cycle—including requirements, testing, review, documentation, definitions, and installation—took about a

year to complete. "The system as a whole is a fairly substantial client/server application talking to a distributed network of SQL Servers running on NT, and the actual workstations are running the client-side code which is all VB," says Armand Sperduti, senior vice president of solutions services at Integra. The radio frequency-based network consists of mobile laptops wheeled through the facilities on carts and fixed-location computers throughout the various jail complexes. These computers share inmate and inmate-account information across seven servers. Using a VC2 app running as an NT server, CJSS also ties in to the county's existing mainframe.

Three VB applications come through the front end. "Each is about 170K a piece. Altogether, there are about 40 forms and 15 BAS files that constitute all three applications together," says Mike Hill, one of the developers. The VB apps use an OLE client written in VC++ to perform the network security.

Currently, the programming team is working with LA County on updates and enhancements. "As long as the county is in business, we'll continue to provide support," says Sperduti. —Amy Little

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Staff locator goes beyond plans

It began as a small application to print updated floorplans for distribution throughout a large law firm in Toronto, Ontario. Now it's a full-blown employee information manager that eventually will make its way to the desktops of all 500 employees at Smith, Lyons, Torrance, Stevenson, & Mayer.

The application, called Staff Manager, displays the location of employees on scrollable floorplans and stores information about each employee. The Payroll, Human Resources, and Information Systems departments can either double-click on an employee's name in a list to view his or her location on the five-level floorplan, or double-click on an employee's name on the floorplan to bring up his or her job title, telephone extension, home phone number, and other information.

James Dean, Communications/Programmer Analyst for Smith, Lyons, started developing the app more than a year ago, when the HR department requested a faster and easier way to modify and print floorplans for weekly distribution. They used to photocopy existing floorplans, white-out the names where employees had left the company or changed locations, write in new names, photocopy the floorplans again, and distribute them.

The company then switched to a CAD program, "but it takes 10 minutes to print each floorplan because there's so much

detail," Dean says. So Dean wrote a VB3 app to replace this tedious process. Dean is most proud of Staff Manager's Print feature. He used API calls to do printing, which made the app print the plans more quickly than the CAD program did.

Adding employee information to the app was a natural progression, Dean says. He also plans to incorporate user and administrator privileges to make it available to everyone in the company.

Having a C background, Dean considered using VC++. But he decided on VB because he "didn't have to reinvent the wheel," he says. "I knew that it would take far too long to create what it took a few months to create in Visual Basic." —Nina Goldschlager

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