

Enhancing the Bouquet with BBJ – KMK Software AG

By Denise Schmitz

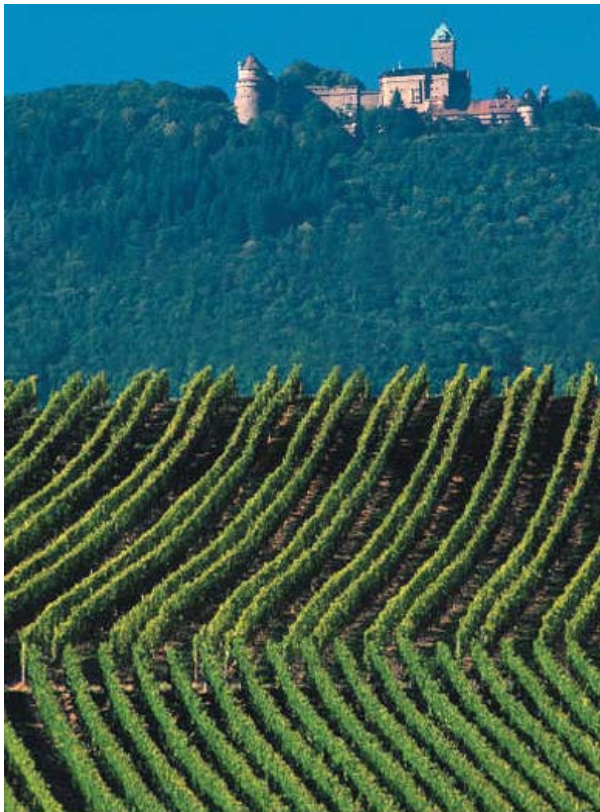


KMK Software AG is a successful software developer in Germany's Rhine River Valley. With 25 years and nearly 8,000 programs worth of experience, their wine management solutions are widely used throughout the German and Austrian wine country. KMK moved from MAI Basic Four systems and now offers turnkey BBx® solutions in PRO/5®, Visual PRO/5®, and BBJ®, the newest BBx generation. In 2004, KMK was the sole software developer to receive the Innovation Prize for Logistics and Operational Management for vineyard management.

The European wine industry is very old and rich with tradition. It is common for vineyards to remain in the same family for many generations. For more than 100 years, wineries relied on manual business processes and credited their success to their skilled wine connoisseurs. In contrast, many of today's manufacturing, processing, and retailing companies require a sophisticated computer system with networks, notebooks, servers, and software to succeed in this new century. So, what place does technology have in the vineyard?

The Creator

Automating this market seemed to be a monumental undertaking, but KMK Software AG approached the challenge with clear direction. KMK, formed in 1978 as KMK Gesellschaft für Softwareentwicklung mbH, is nestled in the heart of Germany's wine country, the Rhine River valley. Their goal was to deliver a complete state-of-the-art software system for wine, sparkling wine, and spirit companies.



This system would deliver modular applications, interfaced with external modules, to meet the growing needs of the wineries, stay in sync with changes in technology, and most importantly, run on a variety of operating systems. KMK selected BASIS software products because the newest generation of BBx met all of these criteria.

The Customer

While individual companies were the conventional customers, many of them formed cooperatives (co-ops) to withstand price-pressure from multi-discounters in the industry. Some co-ops share the resources that process the grapes, and blend and bottle the fermented product. Other companies formed cooperatives that offer computer processing. One sparkling wine company shares their massive computer power with over 30 smaller wineries.

The Challenges

Even with a character-based vine management system already in the marketplace, KMK faced the prevailing misconception that their new computer automation and its software applications were difficult to use, and supported processes that were too different from the winery's established methods, and that the resulting procedures would not adapt to their needs.

Select the Development Tools

With their existing solution already successfully developed in character-based PRO/5, Stephan Knobloch and his team at KMK analyzed a variety of other products, but rapidly concluded that Visual PRO/5 was their graphical development tool of choice. The challenging part of migrating the character-based menus to a graphical interface was converting the underlying 7,000-8,000 programs. They chose to manage this project in-house.

Define Standards and Complete the Migration

Before embarking on the full migration, KMK defined the applications standards and wrote a style guide. Then, with a newly founded subsidiary company of four developers, they moved ahead to complete the remaining programs. During this time, KMK began to develop in the Visual PRO/5 and BBJ languages simultaneously to determine if the promised



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compatibility between the products was valid. The results were just as BASIS promised. In the summer of 2002, with the availability of BBJ 2.0, KMK began running the CUI applications on BBJ.

Since Germany is eight hours ahead of Albuquerque, Stephan changed his priorities to work on the migration in the afternoons. With this shift, he could get advice directly from BASIS engineers and answers to any problems immediately. Stephan praised the technical support and engineering staff at BASIS, *“What other company allows you to communicate directly with the experts actually writing the code? When your own company is not an international giant, it is a very good feeling to know someone ‘over there’ is listening to you!”*

Compare the old character screen in **Figure 1** with the new graphical counterpart in **Figure 2**.



In 2004, with a significant number of modules converted, KMK completed their first BBJ installations. Though hardware from other sources introduced a few stability problems, Stephan is happy with the performance and stability of the turnkey systems they now deliver. Currently, KMK is installing BBJ 3.03, 4.02, and, when possible, 4.03 on Linux and Windows. To date, they support a total of 12 systems running on BBJ.

The Creation

KMK Software AG’s premier application, WEGA, is a finely tuned management instrument with complete access to important customer data and processes offering flexibility for their customers in the wine and spirits marketplace. KMK also works closely with partners from other areas to increase the entire effect of the solution.

The WEGA management system combines two base packages; commodity management and financial accounting.

The commodity management package contains modules tailored specifically to the wine industry - vineyard data management, commission calculation, wine analysis management, customer reports, excise, blending, and bottling planning.

WEGA’s financial accounting includes accounts receivable, accounts payable, purchasing and order processing, and

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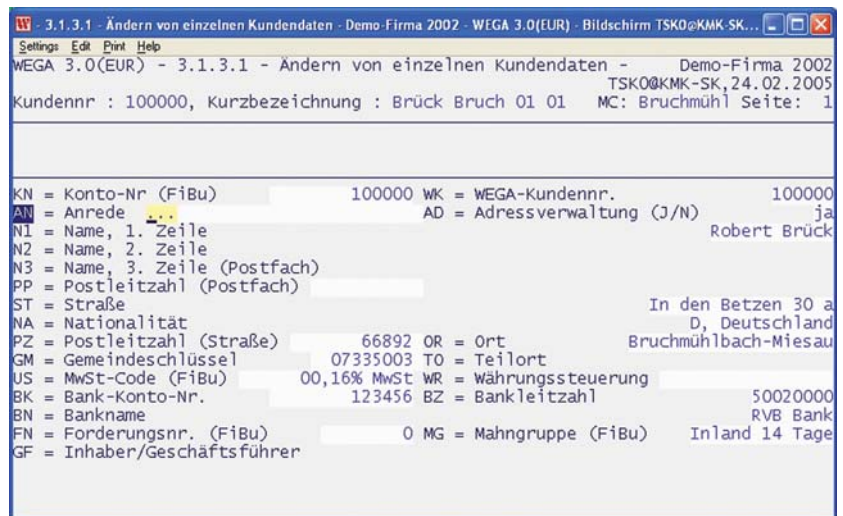


Figure 1. The original character-based Customer Maintenance screen.

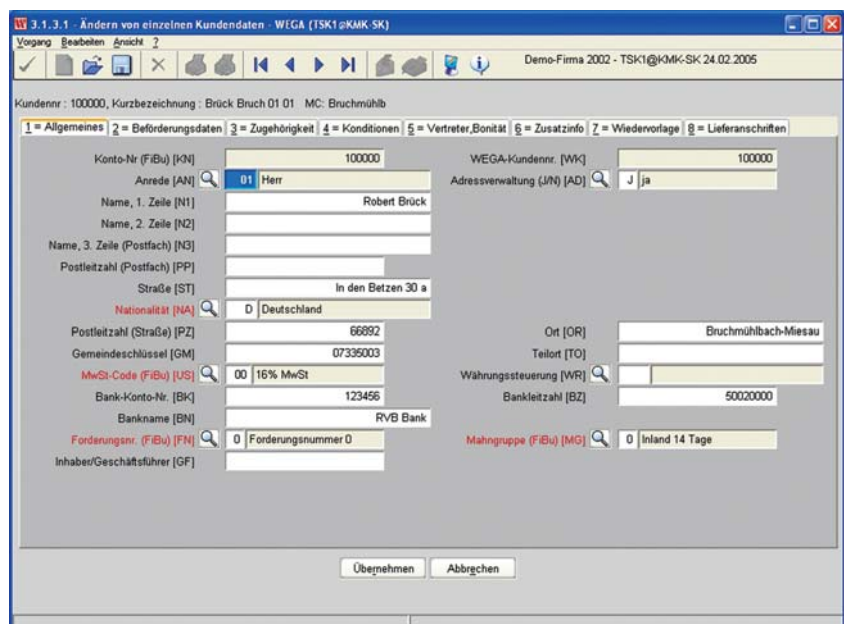


Figure 2. The graphical version of the Customer Maintenance screen shown in Figure 1.

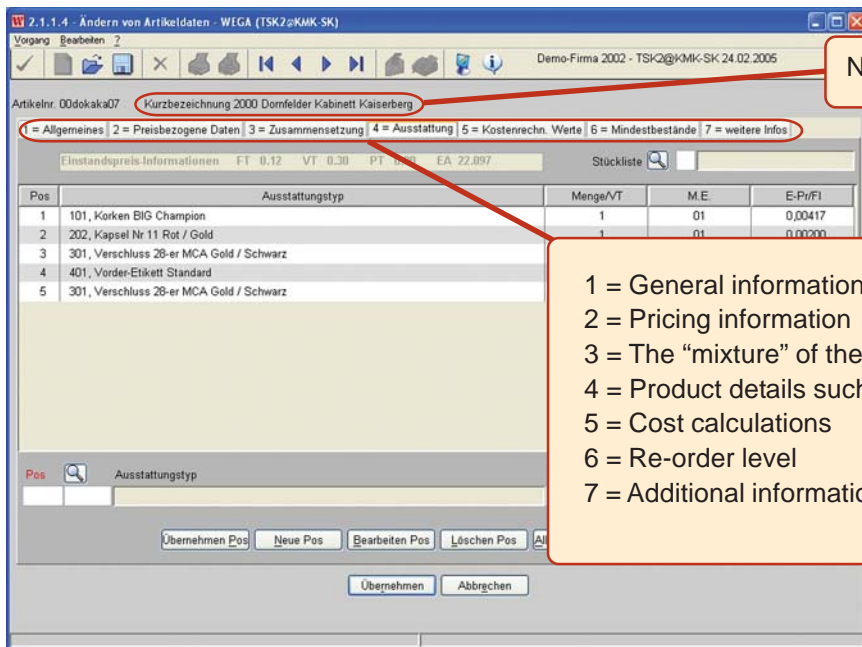


Figure 3. Wine management information by product.

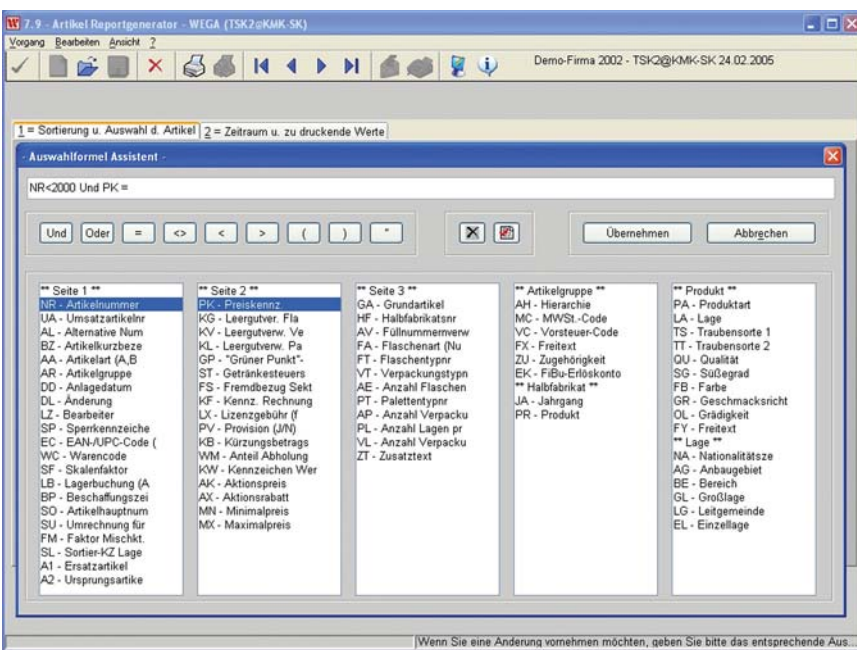


Figure 4. Sample product management report.

warehouse administration modules. The system also supports multiple clients, multiple currencies, and an archiving system for all the necessary accounting data. In addition, this package includes:

Delivery Tracking - tracks the delivery routing all shipments and records the sources/suppliers of the specific contents in each shipment such as the origin of the grapes, the supplier of the bottles and corks, and the type of aroma additives.

Hierarchical Customer – maintains customer data including customer orders and open invoices, provides revenue comparisons, sorts customers according to user-defined criteria. This module also interfaces to Microsoft Excel and Access.

Parts Data Administration – administers parts and part groups, quantity and revenue, price control, and continuous revenue comparison. **Figure 3** shows additional wine management information available within this module.

Report Generator - provides customers a convenient way to create their own reports with a few simple clicks of the mouse, and to print to a printer or file, or export to a MS Excel spreadsheet. **Figure 4** shows a sample report.

The Conclusion

Was BBJ the correct decision? Absolutely, it was. From their

character applications that ran on AIX, and SCO platforms across Novell networks, KMK could migrate, module by module, with the newest BBx environment and use much of their existing source code. BASIS' BBJ contains many benefits over PRO/5 and runs code originally written for PRO/5. Indeed, BASIS delivered these advantages and fulfilled their promises, and continues robust new feature development. The PREVIEW command is one such enhancement that has enormous value to KMK's customers.

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Stephan Knobloch is Chairman of the Board of KMK Software AG. After completing a degree in computer science, Stephan began his career at Software AG, one of Europe's largest and most reputable systems software providers. In 1994, Stephan followed in his father's footsteps and joined KMK, known then as KMK Gesellschaft für Softwareentwicklung mbH. In three short years, he became Managing Director of the company. Then, in 2004, after reorganizing KMK into a share-holding concern, Stephan became Chairman of the Board. Today, Stephan is responsible for the entire technical side of KMK.



The Current Changes

KMK is currently working on a new project, converting their direct database access methodology, to using relational SQL database access methodologies in BBj. The result of this approach will be that KMK will be able to offer their clients a choice of back-end databases, either the BASIS DBMS or alternate RDBS', to use with the WEGA application.

To keep pace with their industry, KMK is also expanding their modules to capture the history of *all* parts of a single product. When necessary, the customer has a complete display of all data at the touch of a button. Stephan explained how necessary this is.

"Alcohol is a foodstuff and European law states that they must be able to determine which product – the bottle, cork, wine, etc. – is in which shipment. If, for example, they discover that a pesticide infected the

cork they obtained from some region in Portugal, the winegrower has two alternatives." Rather than posting an advertisement in the press to warn the public of the potential danger, WEGA users simply press a key to display the relevant information. Immediately they know if they bought corks, which bottles have them, and exactly where those bottles are located. The wineries can then take the appropriate action. *"Guess which option they prefer!"* Stephan adds.

As Stephan glances down at his watch, he comments that BASIS developers are now in the office. This is precious time to a developer and his engineers, so we conclude the interview. After all, time is as precious to a fine wine as it is to the bouquet of applications powered by BBj. 