

Emque Nails GUI With BASIS Tools

By Elizabeth Barnett

If there was a single early adopter of using graphical user interfaces in the BBx® world, Mike Quagliarello, President of Emque Consultants, Inc., could very well be it. Working with BASIS Visual PRO/5® 1.0 back in 1995, Mike was one of the first Business Basic application developers to latch on to the implications of GUI for his Customers.

"We wanted to do it," Mike says, "and Customers loved the look, but there were a lot of performance issues back then, running on 386s and 486s."

With an improved Visual PRO/5, Emque, which provides the commercial construction industry in the New York City area with accounting and project management software, was able to develop the kind of graphical look and feel Customers wanted.

The 10-person shop has recently developed Perfect Project 5.2, the fully GUI version of its five-module, base accounting package. The application has optional modules and customization capability and serves a diverse client base, one that ranges from a single user to 100-user installations and trade contractors pulling down as much as \$250 million a year in revenue. "These companies are doing some very heavy duty information management," Mike says.

Emque not only develops and sells the back-office application, it also serves as sole source of custom development and technical support to all its Customers. "None of them have in-house software development or support people," Mike explains. "They all outsource. Our model is therefore based on long-term relationships."



It's this relationship approach and the industry-specific knowledge Emque possesses that has made the GUI project an overwhelming success. Mike estimates that, to date, 90 percent of his clients are interested in Perfect Project 5.2, 50 percent have seen it demonstrated and 10 to 15 percent have it installed. "We're holding them back," he says. "There's so much work."

Emque has had a significant amount of requests for customization, and word of mouth is selling the application for the company. Just last fall, Emque signed on about nine new Customers from referrals.

When the company set out to develop 5.2, it took a "fresh approach" to providing solutions through the programs, he adds. Having worked out much of the look-and-feel issues earlier, and having implemented data normalization years ago with the first BASIS ODBC Driver® release, Emque concentrated on the program flow and application design. What resulted was a leaner, more intuitive application.

"Our character application was airtight in functionality," Mike explains. "We knew we weren't going to chip away at the business process." But in designing the GUI version, he says, Emque was able to eliminate three quarters of the quantity of programs from the old character application.

As an example, he points to a portion of the Accounts Payable module. "It used to

have different programs to cut checks, print them, etc.," he says. "Now it's all done from one screen.

Figure 1. A screen from the Accounts Payable module of Emque's Perfect Project 5.2. The company has successfully completed the GUI migration of its accounting and project management software for the commercial construction industry. (Click to enlarge.)



"The accountants love it," he adds. He cites a typical Customer reaction: at an on-site rollout of 5.2 at a large Customer installation, accountants were able to intuitively run the application and do their processes. "They actually had fun using the application," Mike says. "They really enjoyed it. I had to run and get the CFO."

Making the application easy and intuitive to use was the goal, he adds. "We didn't want an application where you have to go to the Help files."

With that level of ease and functionality, Mike hopes to have all Emque's Customers using the GUI Perfect Project by the end of this year and to be able to stop selling the character application all together. It will happen, he says, as a result of how much better the GUI application is compared to the character

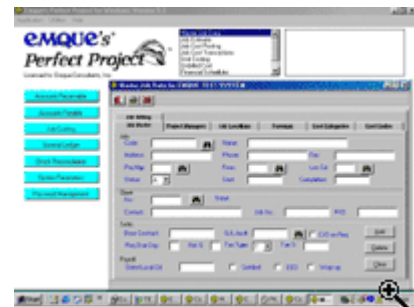
application.

"It won't be because of Bill Gates, and it won't be because it looks pretty," Mike says. "It's the functionality that gets people."

Mike's next phase in making things easier for his Customers hinges on BASIS' next product, BBj®. "We want BBj to be a Web development tool," Mike says.

Perfect Project 5.2 was developed to resemble a Web page, with colors and bitmaps designed to blend with browsers. It's the next logical step, Mike says, for his Customers to be able to open up a browser anywhere, log into their accounts and manage their supply chains, accounting and project tracking through the Internet.

Figure 2. Emque's newly GUI Perfect Project 5.2 allows users to manage commercial construction projects using graphical user interfaces. The interfaces are designed with Web browsers in mind, as Emque plans to host the application over the Internet for Customers. (Click to enlarge.)



Emque, as the software expert to its Customers, already provides all technical support and maintenance for the application. Becoming an application service provider (ASP) and hosting the application itself would be a perfect solution, one that his Customers are already requesting. "It's absolutely, positively in our future," he says.