

Mission Accomplished: Mark Systems' GUI Migration

By Elizabeth Barnett

In the Q2 2000 issue, we told you about Mark Systems, a New Jersey-based company specializing in homebuilder software. The company began a GUI migration of its Integrated Homebuilder Management System (IHMS) in 1999 and released a fully GUI package in August of 2000.

The response has been a bit overwhelming for the small business, which is comprised of 12 people. With only a four- to five-person team moving Mark Systems' Customers to the GUI version of IHMS, the company is proceeding one Customer at a time. To date, the team has switched over about 20 percent of its Customers to the graphical version.

"The feedback I've gotten has been very positive," says Scott Duman, Mark Systems Vice President. "To the controllers and finance executives, IHMS with a graphical user interface didn't make much difference, but to the people actually using the system to enter data, it's made everything so much easier. And those executives aren't hearing the complaints typical with character systems anymore. They're very pleased."

Mark Systems used GUIBuilder® and ResBuilder®, the development workbench and resource builder in BASIS Visual PRO/5®. Every program in the old IHMS was touched, but Scott says the migration team found it could eliminate many overlaps in the GUI redesign. The GUI IHMS has about 176 programs to the old version's approximately 300. "It makes changes and maintenance a lot easier now," he adds.

Having completed the GUI redesign, the team now concentrates on the work of switching Customers to the GUI version. Scott explains that Mark Systems takes a three-phase approach to the process:



1. Site Survey – "We want to make sure they have the horsepower at the client and the server to handle the GUI IHMS. Also, we have to determine whether they need to upgrade and to what level. Some of our Customers are coming from UNIX, some have Windows 2000."
2. Upgrade – "Then we upgrade the existing character system to the current Visual PRO/5."
3. Switch to GUI IHMS – "For a new Customer who has little or no customization of the IHMS, this takes about two hours," he says. "For older Customers who may have a lot of customization of the programs, it can take to six to 10 man-days." Additionally, he says, some long-term Customers have custom modules added to the IHMS. In those cases, Mark Systems will develop a GUI version of the module on request.

Further down the line is a possible ASP model for IHMS, one in which builders, real estate developers, suppliers, sellers and even home buyers can log on to one location and get all the information they need about a particular homebuilder project. The company plans to use BBJ to allow the various parties to access IHMS through a browser over the Internet. Mark Systems built the virtualbuilder.net interface using the Basic Web Utility from BASIS. The company is currently demonstrating the interface to Customers.

