



RLA Chooses BASIS For Customers' Connectivity Needs By Elizabeth Barnett

When Boeing, Honeywell and United Technologies need to check their distributors' inventory levels on critical electronic components, they need answers right away. And the new Web-enabled application being implemented by their distributor, Air Electro, Inc. will provide those answers, thanks to application developer Rennie, Lindsey and Associates (RLA) and BASIS technology.

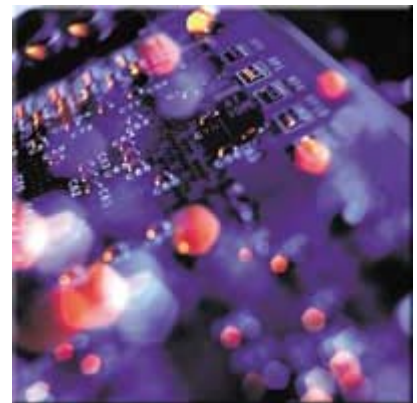
Air Electro manufactures and distributes connectors, contacts and other electronic components to Fortune 500 companies, counting some of the top aerospace and defense firms in the United States among its clientele. The company needed to implement an e-commerce application, one that would allow clients like Boeing to check inventory levels on the some 17,000 items Air Electro distributes and to place orders, check order status and track shipments over the Internet. Air Electro turned to its long-standing partner and accounting application provider, RLA.

Converting From OpenBASIC

RLA was faced with a major challenge. The company was founded in 1988 and a year later released its popular accounting application, called ASSIST, for wholesale distribution and light manufacturing. The package was originally developed on the OpenBASIC platform, but several years ago, they realized they needed more modern tools for development. "There really was no development path in OpenBASIC anymore," says Philip Lindsey, head of sales and marketing for RLA. "We knew our Customers wanted and needed to transfer and look at data outside the application, using office tools like Crystal Reports and Microsoft Access. They needed to connect to back-end database applications like Oracle. We didn't have an answer with OpenBASIC."

For a forward-thinking company like RLA, conversion to another Business BASIC with ODBC capability for office functions and SQL for connection to external databases was the only feasible option. RLA evaluated several flavors of Business BASIC and ultimately chose BASIS BBX®. Philip cites the reasons RLA selected BASIS BBX technology over competing Business BASIC products.

"We felt BASIS' evolution of the language had kept more to the original spirit of Business BASIC," Philip explains. "It seemed BASIS was more disciplined in regard to the types of changes and customization made to the language." This was important to RLA because the company prides itself on delivering customized solutions, fine-tuned to the Customer's needs and specifications. Some 70 percent of RLA's average annual revenue of \$1.2 million comes from custom services and support. "We believe that 'mods' is a four-letter word that does not need to be avoided but encouraged," says RLA President John Rennie. The difficulty involved in maintaining ASSIST in the face of new customizations by the language provider was a real concern. "We were able to leverage the consistency of design," Philip says.



Adding GUI

"We also felt that BASIS' graphical model was flat out better for us," Philip adds as another reason RLA chose BASIS. RLA preferred the way Visual PRO/5® handles

events. "Visual PRO/5® delivers the event as a whole package of information," Philip explains. This makes it possible for a developer to write and set up small programs to specify what will happen with those events. It makes scaling an application up and/or modularizing an application much easier. "It makes a lot of things much more elegant," he says. "It makes programs easier to read, faster to write and easier to maintain."

Looking ahead, John knew his Customers, existing and prospective, would want graphical capabilities and the choice of implementing GUI for certain modules of the ASSIST application. "A purely graphical application is a mistake," John says. "Our base needs both character and graphical options." BASIS Visual PRO/5 allows developers to pick and choose which portions of an application will be graphical. Once RLA had converted to PRO/5♦, which took about three months, the RLA team turned to adding GUI elements to the ASSIST package. RLA's graphical version was recently introduced to its Customer base, and RLA is actively developing a dealer network. Air Electro plans to take advantage of this graphical capability soon, implementing the GUI portions of its new version of ASSIST.

A Clear Development Path

Again, looking ahead, RLA was intrigued with the long-term development path and possibilities BASIS' Java strategy with BBJ® can provide to RLA Customers. It was another reason to go with BASIS. Having learned some of the Java language on his own, Philip says he loves Java. "I think it has a great future, and we liked the fact that BASIS was looking at the entire software industry and deciding on the bigger picture. We felt they were out there taking a chance in the right direction." Philip looks forward to using new features in BBJ, particularly BBJ's event handling with callbacks and process events functions. "It makes the programming even more elegant," he says.

But for right now, RLA has a satisfied Customer in Air Electro with the conversion to PRO/5 and the ODBC and SQL features that come with it. "The Internet and online capability is very important to our aerospace and defense Customers," says Air Electro President Steve Strull, "and it's not only important to our Customers but also to our suppliers, brokers and other distributors." The conversion to PRO/5 has been pretty seamless, Steve says, but that's just what he expected from RLA and just what RLA continues to deliver.

For more information about RLA, ASSIST software or RLA's call RLA at 661.259.5903.

Screenshots from an RLA graphical demonstrator

