ZK Simply Rich

Case Study

ZK - THE SIMPLEST WAY TO MAKE WEB APPLICATIONS RICH.

Spidex is the UK and Irish distributor of the market-leading Enterprise Asset Management (EAM) System Mainsaver, used in over 3,000 locations worldwide with applications in manufacturing, facilities, and utilities sectors.

"ZK provides a means of supplying a rich user interface with minimum complexity."

ABOUT SPIDEX

Spidex Software Ltd is a provider of leading-edge software solutions for engineering maintenance management. With a wide-ranging customer base that includes many different manufacturing operations, air and seaports, hospitals and educational establishments; Spidex has proven expertise in project delivery across many environments.

THE PROJECT

This project is to develop the Spidex Web Maintenance Module (WMM). WMM will give Spidex's customers personnel even quicker ways to access the information required to do their day-to-day jobs. Typically, the users of Spidex's products are engineering or maintenance technicians. They may not have had formal IT training and may be disinclined to use management systems if it is complex or time-consuming to do so. Therefore, Web Maintenance Module is required be fast, easy to use and attractive to look at.

THE CHALLENGE

The user interface of WMM provides two means of Web navigation: a "mouse" driven approach and a "touchscreen" interface. The challenge with the mouse-driven interface is to try and provide a better user experience than offered by Struts or JSPs, preferably to a near desktop application level. The challenge with touchscreen navigation lies with trying to produce a balance between usability of controls and being able to display sufficient information to the user in a Web environment.

WHY ZK

ZK, Spring MVC, Echo, and GWT were considered during evaluation. Spring was dismissed as not being able to deliver a rich user experience. According to Spidex, "GWT was considered but discarded for a number of reasons: firstly, a server-side solution was preferred architecturally; secondly, GWT required more know-ledge of Swing than was available; thirdly, GWT was seen as not being integrated easily with Hibernate or iBatis, through its demand for serialization of data objects."

> "The ability to use ZUL to prototype a screen with user feedback is extremely useful. The prototype can then be developed into the actual interface, reducing initial development time."

Echo was seriously considered, but the development on the project appears stalled. In addition, while it is server-based, again it is based on a Swing approach – of which Web developers tend to lack experience.

ZK was selected on the basis of it being server-side. In addition, ZK provides a straightforward markup language, which was more appropriate for Web developers. The mark-up language additionally provided ZK with a huge advantage over its competitors – the ability to rapidly prototype screens. This allows interfaces to be designed in co-operation with users to a point of satisfaction, after which the same screens can be "wired-up" to the back end services.

In the end, Spidex came up with ZK, Spring (with Acegi), and iBatis.

THE RESULT

One of Spidex's first potential customers to see a pilot version remarked that it had exactly the same look and feel as a desktop application!