VERTEX

VERTEX®

HELPING BUSINESSES DEAL WITH TAXES

With more than 30 years of experience, Vertex® Inc., is the leading provider of enterprise corporate tax solutions and process management services worldwide. Founded in 1978, Vertex is a privately held company that employs more than 600 professionals at its headquarters in the U.S. (Berwyn, PA) and offices across the country and in Europe.

Vertex solutions help companies streamline and integrate tax provision and compliance processes, and leverage information to discover new strategic tax savings across every major line of business tax, including income, sales, consumer use, value added, communications, and payroll. To serve its customers, Vertex works in partnership with the world's leading providers of ERP software and related services.

STREAMLINING DIVERSE DATABASE INTERFACES

When Enterprise Software Architect John Hart was assigned to the design of a new product in the company's Vertex Q Series® tax solution for businesses, he knew he wanted a few things done differently—and better.

The product—Vertex Communications Tax Q Series—would provide wireless and wireline telecommunications providers with the latest tax rules and regulations for thousands of taxing jurisdictions that today require strict compliance. It would seamlessly interface with billing applications to simplify tax processes. It was in the area of this interfacing that Hart sought a better approach to database connectivity.

"We've had to deal with the challenge of providing our solutions on a variety of hardware and database platforms", Hart explains. "In the time before ODBC was viewed as 'mature' our approach to database connectivity was to utilize the native capabilities of each database vendor."

"This approach to database connectivity", says Hart, "introduced a lot of complexity for the Vertex development team. We needed to code and maintain a Database Programmer's Interface (DPI) layer within our systems to abstract data access for each database type and database version that we supported."

He continued, "This caused a lot of drudgery associated with recoding and testing changes that impacted the DPI layer, because any change at this level needed to be replicated for each database that we supported."

John Viglione, Vertex Chief Technology Officer, explains that the company's broad platform support is a critical value that Vertex offers its customers and partners. In business more than 30 years, the company's technology spans generations of IT advancements—from COBOL through the latest SOA environments. Viglione explains

CHALLENGE

Devote development personnel to the company's core competency rather than having them address complex data connectivity requirements

SOLUTION

Progress® DataDirect Connect® for ODBC

BENEFIT

Development personnel freed to focus on revenue-producing projects

---

VERTEX

✳ **PROGRESS**

that this is in part due to customer demand, but is also in large part due to its partner ecosystem.

"We plan for multiple and flexible types of deployment," he says. "Our technology can be used as a hosted solution or inside the firewall; we support multiple system integrations—ERP systems, and proprietary billing systems, for example, which implies that we have to partner with all the major software vendors. We typically design our products in a way that complements our partners' platform technology directives."

A COMMON CONNECTIVITY ARCHITECTURE

"I knew there were commercial ODBC drivers out there," says John Hart. "It was clear that it would simplify our lives significantly if we could go with just one database connectivity technology."

Several vendors' ODBC driver products were considered before Vertex settled on Progress® DataDirect Connect® for ODBC.

"We evaluated the others," Hart recalled. "But they lacked the extremely broad platform coverage we needed."

Used by countless organizations to deliver high-quality, high-performance applications, the DataDirect wire protocol ODBC drivers need no client libraries that other vendors rely on to connect with the database; this design greatly simplifies deployment and facilitates throughput.

"We were really attracted to the wire protocol design," says Hart. "We knew we were going to get as fast or faster performance than the ODBC connectivity models provided by the database vendors."

But Hart goes on to stress that standardization was even more key to the solution. "We needed the ability to just write standard SQL to cover all of our needs for connectivity," he says.

Because taxes change continuously, Vertex must deliver constant updates to its customers. Maintaining the product is thus somewhat more involved than the usual maintenance routine; the company must send out updates every month or sometimes even sooner, depending upon what sort of legislative activity takes place.

"If we're able to reduce the complexity of supporting multiple platforms" says Viglione, "it enables us to reduce the time and effort involved in the release of our products.."

FOCUS ON BUSINESS, SUPERB CUSTOMER SUPPORT

Unlike many other vendors, Progress DataDirect provides a common, standards-based connectivity architecture across database types and versions with no proprietary approaches that can restrict flexibility.

The DataDirect Connect for ODBC drivers have provided Vertex with the broad support needed for a multitude of operating systems and database types and versions, in both 32-bit and 64-bit computing models. Freed of the need for developers and architects to track and monitor data connectivity drivers, Vertex personnel can now devote itself to the company's core competency.

"We like to focus our development resources on tax technology," Viglione says. "To the extent that we can deploy resources to focus on tax technology as opposed to porting issues such as building drivers, then that's obviously a business win for us. With the Communications Tax Q product we were able to utilize DataDirect to simplify the driver support we required."

> *"Numerous vendors lack an OEM support model...though they make that claim. DataDirect says it, and they do it."*
>
> *John Viglione*
> *Chief Technology Officer*
> *Vertex*

PROGRESS

"DataDirect has absolutely saved us a lot of development time," adds John Hart. "The relationship they have with the database vendors keeps Progress DataDirect on top of the advancements and features of the database technology, so we don't have to be."

Hart adds that the superb DataDirect documentation makes it easy for him to navigate through and find what he needs to refresh his memory even for projects he's moved on from some time back.

"It really helps me when I'm drawn back into issues at an established customer's site to get things straightened out quickly," he says.

"Tax technology is complex requiring extensive research and documentation," notes Viglione. "We develop volumes of documentation around tax technology, so we appreciate it when another vendor has clear and concise documentation."

It's the support organization that DataDirect puts behind its technology, however, that Vertex values going forward.

"DataDirect support is highly responsive and very knowledgeable," says Hart. "We recently had a multithreading issue that was quite complicated in terms of locating the source—whether it was in our system, the customer's system, or the database drivers. Progress DataDirect worked with us in narrowing it down to the customer's system and getting it resolved."

DataDirect technical support extends well beyond simply troubleshooting and resolving issues, too. Hart reports that when a Vertex application needed connectivity to a platform that Progress DataDirect did not currently support, that support was subsequently provided inside a 2–3 week timeframe.

Hart offered a good example, as well, as to the confidence Vertex has come to have in the ability of DataDirect products to deliver the highest-quality data connectivity.

"Our manager of alliances tells us that whenever he receives an RFP asking whether our software supports a particular platform we haven't yet supported, he refers to the Progress DataDirect Web site: if DataDirect supports the platform, he knows he can issue a positive response without any further research into the matter."

Viglione emphasizes that it's this level of support that makes DataDirect important to Vertex going into the future. It is indicative of a company having strong OEM capabilities—that understands what it is to partner with a software company as opposed to a company that has an internal deployment of their technology.

"A lot of vendors lack an OEM support model," he says. "They can't respond quickly to changes in the environment and platform issues, though they may make that claim. Progress DataDirect says it, and they do it."

PROGRESS