Wheeling & Lake Erie Railway Finds the Right Track to Modernization

Case Study Highlights

- **Company:** Wheeling & Lake Erie Railway (W&LE)
- **Industry:** Transportation
- **Business Challenge:** Green screen applications and manual data input methods increased rick of errors in customer orders
- **Solutions:** W&LE modernized their aging green screens and built a self service customer web portal with Profound UI

About Wheeling & Lake Erie Railway

Learn how Wheeling & Lake Erie Railway easily modernized their aging green screens and built a self-service customer web portal with Profound UI. Web enabling their 5250 applications and enhancing their customer experience.

The Challenge

W&LE is responsible for all aspects of rail transport for its customers, including picking up and dropping off materials, locomotive repair, and track maintenance. The railway relies on the IBM i platform to store and manage the information that powers their business. "We're very happy with the reliability of the platform," explains Marc Masters, IT Director at W&LE. "In addition to all of our internal company data, our IBM i stores data about the movement of our trains, the working hours of our crew, and the safety of our cargo."

The company had no plans to leave IBM i behind, but they did realize it was time to give their applications an update. "Our applications were standard RPG green screens, a combination of templates and modules received from other railway companies and 20 years of custom development," states Masters. "Not only were we using outdated green screens for our applications, we also had very manual processes for placing orders from our customers." For instance, when a W&LE customer wanted to order a shipment through the railway, they would contact a W&LE employee directly. That employee would then manually enter the customer's order into the 5250 application. "Some customers did utilize an EDI solution, but the process of inputting data was still very manual and tedious," explained Masters. "And one wrong keystroke could cause significant problems with the order."

The Solution

The railway's application modernization project had taken on a new dimension: Web enable their 5250 applications and improve their customers' ordering experience. "We wanted to streamline the ways in which our customers could place orders and offer feedback," says Masters. "We came to the conclusion that we needed to create an automated, selfservice application for our customers, which would eliminate the 'middle man' and enable them to easily place their own orders online."

The W&LE development team initially created some applications with Websphere, with less than satisfactory results. "Unfortunately, the result wasn't intuitive, attractive, or easy for our customers to use," says Masters. "We realized that we would need to bring in a third party vendor to give our developers the right tools to achieve the desired results."

The railway began their search for a development tool that would meet their needs. "We wanted a solution that didn't just reface our green screens, but would enable us to create applications from scratch,". Masters explains. "We also wanted a tool that didn't require our developers to learn a new language, and that would deliver excellent results without becoming Web development experts." That's when W&LE turned to Profound Logic Software for the solution they needed – Profound UI.

> "We looked at different third-party solutions, and Profound UI stood out to us immediately. Now our customers can send us their orders directly from our Website, which eliminates the time, effort and potential errors that would occur with our old methods."
>
> **Marc M.**
> **IT Director, Wheeling & Lake Erie Railway**

The Results

With Profound UI from Profound Logic, Masters and his team were able to create the applications they had envisioned. Profound UI is a full-featured graphical user interface platform based on IBM's RPG Open Access, the ground-breaking enhancement to RPG that opens IBM i applications up to Web interfaces. The platform offers developers an easy, natural method for creating connected IBM i applications that deliver rich user experiences regardless of project complexity or organization size.

"We looked at different third-party solutions, and Profound UI stood out to us immediately," states Masters. "We were especially impressed to see positive reviews of the tool from experts in the IBM i community. That definitely helped us make our decision." Masters and his development team were able to get up to speed with the product in a matter of days, and easily created robust customer-facing Web applications for submitting orders and feedback. "Now our customers can send us their orders directly from our Website, which eliminates the time, effort and potential errors that would occur with our old methods."

The railway is now exploring other opportunities to streamline and improve their processes. "We're currently planning a project to outfit our conductors with mobile devices and Profound UI applications. This would enable them to enter their workday information, like hours worked and delivery status, directly into the database as events happen rather than filing a form at the end of the day, which would get vital information to us, faster."

Masters looks forward to this and other projects with Profound Logic tools. "Working with Profound is excellent. We haven't needed to change the way we code in order to create out-of-this-world Web applications. We had worked with some tools that almost did what we were looking for, but Profound actually gets the job done."