

FOR  
SOLUTIONS

SOFTWARE

# Thinking big to take on the world

After years of consulting on accounting applications, a former reseller decided to build his own application.

By Warwick Ashford

#### THE WIDER PICTURE:

Malcolm Granville of Web Accounting Solutions says financial software needs to be fast and ready to take on the world's languages and currencies.

Like all good innovators, Malcolm Granville, MD of Web Accounting Solutions, was inspired by the needs of real world when architecting the Acknowledge accounting suite, which he says is ready after three years in development, including a year of beta testing.

"Knowing the needs of business and the pitfalls of most of the accounting on the market, I set out to design a solution that was robust, fast, flexible and affordable, with minimal hardware requirements," says Granville.

Assuming the air of a software crusader, Granville says he was determined to develop an application that did not have the frustrations, limitations and hidden pitfalls he came across during his experience in the industry. "The beta phase has also been a very hands-on exercise with valuable input coming from our beta sites," adds Granville.

"When architecting Acknowledge, I was consciously 'thinking big', because I felt it was important for the resultant application to be ready for the international arena from the very start without having to bolt on functionality or regional customisations later," he says.

The resultant application make provision for unlimited transactions, users, and financial years, user activity monitoring, full audit trails, custom fields, and customisable financial reports that can be emailed or exported as well as providing support for multiple languages and currencies.

#### BABEL SOFTWARE

"By maintaining the individual rate of exchange for each international transaction and the local currency equivalent enables invoices to be issued in foreign currencies and ensures the trial balance and financial statements at year-end will correspond," says Granville.

Although he concedes the entry of exchanges rates is still a manual process, Granville says automatic updating of exchange rates via the Internet is planned.

"We believe the multi-currency functionality in the application is unique, because in most accounting systems the new exchange rate is reflected in reports of his-

torical data," clarifies Granville.

Further enhancing the application's international usability is its linguistic support for English, Afrikaans, Zulu, Xhosa, French and Portuguese.

### SOLID DATABASE FOUNDATION

In line with his declared goals, Granville chose the Caché post-relational database from InterSystems for its speed, scalability, data integrity, relatively low hardware requirements and "live" backup capability.

On a technical note, Granville explains that the Acknowledge application consists of DHTML, JavaScript and XML data packets, which in turn interfaces with the Caché database via its CSP server-side scripting technology.

Henry Adams, InterSystems country manager, says: "As a new application built on Caché, Acknowledge was able to leverage off InterSystems' knowledge of best practices and support in terms of the partnership model that supports our philosophy that business is about technology."

Flexibility and accessibility were high on Granville's list of design requirements presented to Cape Town-based developers, Intrepid Solutions. To meet these requirements, the five-member development team built Acknowledge to be browser-based and Web-centric, using Intrepid's Portico Web application development tool.

### ACCESS CONTROL

For Granville, the choice of Portico was also an important one. "Not only does Portico offer a rich toolbox for creating interactive data-centric DHTML pages and enable the use of Web technologies such as CSP, PHP, JSP and their associated databases, but Portico's integrated development environment requires no additional browser extensions or Java applets to be installed."

This is important, because it enables the implementation of secure socket layer (SSL) protocols to provide security between the Web server and the browser, explains Granville.

### MAXIMISING MOBILITY

"Acknowledge is designed to reside on a single company server behind an appropri-

ate firewall along with all financial data, so it can be accessed internally on an intranet, but can also be accessed from outside the company via the Internet from anywhere in the world by business owners, accountants or auditors, using nothing but a Web browser," explains Granville.

Although able to run on both the Windows and Linux operating systems for the server, Acknowledge currently supports only Microsoft's Internet Explorer version 5.5 or higher browsers. However, Granville is quick to point out that wider browser support is already in development. "Acknowledge will fit naturally into services-oriented architecture, meaning it can be delivered as a Web-service very easily," adds Adams.

Acknowledge uses a thin client model, which is aimed at delivering faster access and a single installation on a company server to save the deployment and maintenance costs usually associated with accounting applications.

Granville says the application has been designed to meet the growth possibilities and financial constraints of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) as well as provide a comprehensive accounting software package.

"The price of Acknowledge is close to similar SME accounting solutions, but also includes the database, Web accessibility and other features usually found only in more expensive enterprise class applications, plus the unique features already mentioned," he says with a smile. ■

### ACKNOWLEDGE ADVANTAGES

The features of the accounting package mean that it can offer several advantages.

Web Accounting Solutions' Malcolm Granville explains that Acknowledge can:

- scale easily as businesses grow;
- saves money on additional software and training;
- provides access to all past financial data; and
- can be used in any country for international trade.

### LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

There is a 60 percent likelihood that auto-location technology investment portfolios will deliver superior returns from 2010 to 2020, says the Gartner Research Group. Emerging technologies will integrate location awareness into every connected device in the next five to 10 years, says a report from the research group, and sensor network technologies will dramatically increase the number of connected devices. IT managers will be likely to face the problem of managing location data for every asset they track. Therefore, now IT projects need to accommodate location-related information.

### MOBILE DIGITISED MOVIES

Sony plans to digitise 500 movies to make them available in 2006 for mobile devices including phones, portable media centres and the Sony PSP game console. The move is seen by many as an attempt to cash in on movies in the same way that Apple did with its iTunes online music store.



### NEW WAVE WIRELESS

Intel predicts that mobile devices using WiMax wireless technology could be rolled out by the end of 2006. This is when it will unveil its new "Rosedale" chip designed to enable devices to receive WiMax signals. Unlike WiFi, WiMax is designed to cover much larger physical areas, such as cities or rural settlements. Intel says WiMax technology could have a big impact on mobile Internet use and Internet-based telephony because it has the potential to deliver always-on, always-accessible broadband networks across a wide area. Intel says it is working with equipment manufacturers to help reduce the price of WiMax equipment to promote adoption. ■

