IBM Business Partner NetSphere Strategies puts village on the "express" path to efficiency

Brick by brick, the village of Bolingbrook near Chicago is building an IT infrastructure that is reducing bureaucracy and improving "customer" satisfaction among citizenry. Paving the way is IBM Business Partner NetSphere Strategies, the architect of an IBM Express-based solution enabling the government to deliver online business services.

Using IBM WebSphere Application Server Express as the foundation for a portal, the Business Partner has created a more responsive, cost-effective and customer-friendly way for citizens of the Chicago-area suburb to do business with the village government.

Long lines and inconvenience are alleviated as residents can make payments for various village services online. Parking tickets can be paid and vehicles can be registered online. Links to other sites enable residents to pay county taxes from the village portal, as well as pay for water and refuse services. One of the more innovative applications for the self-service technology, which runs on the IBM @server™ xSeries, enables

Overview

■ *IBM Business Partner:*
NetSphere Strategies, a business and technology firm focused on delivering online business solutions that drive new revenue streams, reduce operational costs, and increase employee productivity.

■ *Client:*
Village of Bollingbrook

■ *IBM PartnerWorld Offerings:*
IBM Virtual Innovation Center
Solutions Builder Express
Technical support

residents to purchase personalized bricks laid before a community fountain in the center of Bolingbrook.

The IBM solution also reduces delays associated with payment processing from batch-oriented, back-office systems, which run on the IBM @server™ iSeries. Real-time order processing is helping to improve responsiveness to citizen requests.

"Thanks to NetSphere Strategies, we've created a virtual finance department for pennies compared to the cost of hiring or maintaining additional staff to get service levels where we want them," says Greg Dover, director, Information Technology, village of Bolingbrook. "Now we are more responsive to

Business Partner whose principle focus is building commerce, portal, and online self-service solutions for small and medium businesses. Help was sought in assessing how the finance department could improve business processes building on core IBM technology already in place. Officials sought an IBM Business Partner with a depth of skills working with IBM technology along with experience delivering self-service solutions.

"This was not about building a new infrastructure, but about taking an existing foundation and helping the client operate more efficiently by re-engineering business processes and workflows, and do so without a million-dollar investment," says

free, open source connectivity technology to access the Village's back-office systems, keeping software costs to a minimum.

"The IBM Express portfolio is the perfect entry point to technology for small and mid-sized organizations like the village of Bolingbrook," says Moen. "It's like a seed we help clients plant that can help them grow their business or solve challenges that may be unique to their company – quickly and for a modest investment."

And take root it has in Bolingbrook. The self-service site was up and running in less than a month and officials have seen steady growth in the number of users since its implementation. "The flexibility of WebSphere technology allows us to plug in new capabilities into the application server as we need them. Our vision is to keep adding new features with a quick ROI, and WebSphere Application Server Express is the right solution for our needs." says Dover. He credits the site with helping to reduce administrative costs and allowing the village to redirect personnel to more strategic areas of governing. It is also providing improved access to the municipality's electorate.

> *"The IBM Express portfolio is the perfect entry point to technology for small and mid-sized organizations like the village of Bolingbrook. It's like a seed we help clients plant that can help them grow their business or solve challenges that may be unique to their company – quickly and for a modest investment."*

taxpayers and we can improve service levels without adding costs."

Improve business processes

While it is a local government, the village of Bolingbrook operates like countless small and mid-sized businesses seeking to better align technology with business goals – without significant investment. With this in mind, village officials turned to NetSphere Strategies, an IBM

Stephan Moen, director, Business Development, NetSphere Strategies, formerly known as WebSphere Strategies.

The IBM Express portfolio fits the bill in three key ways – price, flexibility and ease of deployment. Moen says that WebSphere Application Server Express provided an affordable, flexible solution based on open standards. The solution incorporates

Similarly, IBM Express-based offerings are improving NetSphere Strategies access to clients. The firm is not only proposing IBM Express solutions, but it is using sales enablement tools like Solutions Builder Express to help it close more business. Having

participated in Solutions Builder Express Technical Sales Enablement events, the firm is now using the tool to help it demonstrate return on investment to potential clients. Support and services are engaged through the Solutions Accelerator program associated with Solutions Builder Express. Moreover, Moen says his firm is so enamored of the Express family of offerings that it is pursuing the credentials to use the "Built on Express" emblem, which validates the firm's skills in designing and delivering Express-based solutions.

Mortar in the solution

Support provided through IBM PartnerWorld was the mortar in the solution, says Moen, since it enabled NetSphere Strategies to deliver the self-help site in a timely manner and to address client requirements each step of the way – from pre-sales to implementation.

An array of IBM professional certifications available through PartnerWorld helped the Business Partner acquire and refine skills necessary to assist the village of Bolingbrook – and so many other small and medium businesses that are turning to the firm. These same credentials, says Dover, helped reinforce his confidence in the firm's capabilities.

"I knew they had a firm grasp on our requirements – right down to raising key questions that guided us in the direction we needed to go," says Dover.

The IBM Virtual Innovation Center (VIC) also played a pivotal role in helping the firm secure the business and in ensuring a smooth implementation. The VIC provides IBM Business Partners with online resources and telephone-based support needed to develop, market and implement solutions using IBM products.

Through the VIC, NetSphere Strategies received technical support and integration assistance. VIC support staff guided the Business Partner to use the IBM Toolbox for Java as an open source solution for connectivity between WebSphere Application Server Express and the IBM DB2 Universal Data Base on the iSeries platform. This freeware enabled NetSphere Strategies to lower the total cost of the solution it was proposing so that it remained inside the client's budget. Moreover, pre-sales support through the VIC helped validate the firm's proposed solution.

"By using the strengths of the different IBM support organizations through PartnerWorld, we extended our internal capabilities and became confident that the components we were putting together would work together," says Moen.

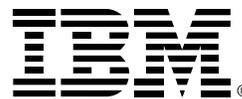Indeed, the firm is deepening its investment in the IBM Express family of offerings

That support will continue to play an important role in NetSphere Strategies' success as it works alongside village officials as they

expand the number of uses for the self-service site and increase its capabilities. Village officials see many potential new uses for the site – "There's a lot we can do with this foundation in place, and NetSphere Strategies and IBM are going to be key to getting it done" says Dover. Now that's a vote of confidence.

For more information on IBM PartnerWorld, go to: www.ibm.com/partnerworld and to learn more about NetSphere Strategies, visit: http://www.netspherestrategies.com