



Customer Success: University of Texas, Office of Sponsored Projects

FDfMerge

Key Benefits

- Server-side solution eliminates client platform issues
- Flattened forms can be opened in Acrobat Reader

Metrics

- Over 500 end users
- Over 30 Super users
- Initial average volume is 400 pages per month

Server Software

- FDfMerge
- Windows 2000
- HP-UX (Web server)
- ADABAS

The Office of Sponsored Projects at the University of Texas in Austin assists faculty researchers in securing grant funding from external sources and facilitates ongoing administrative tasks. This is a paperwork intensive process that requires meticulous record keeping to assure compliance with numerous university policies and government regulations.

The Office of Sponsored Projects (OSP) needed to find a solution that they could build and maintain internally as the staff in charge of the campus-wide computing infrastructure could not allocate resources to handle departmental problems. The goal was to create a database driven repository that can be used to generate completed forms on demand. Building the repository and attaching a Web-based interface was straightforward enough, but satisfying the end users (the researchers) was more difficult.

OSP's developers built a Web-based front end that allowed researchers or their staff to enter information on their projects. The Original OSP system took user input and generated batch print jobs at the campus reprographics center. This required sharing the printer resources with the rest of the campus community. While this solution helped streamline operations at the OSP, the end users were not happy with the slow turnaround—often hours and the inconvenience hiking across a large campus to retrieve the printed copies.

A second-generation system built with the Acrobat SDK and Microsoft ASP Server pages, which required end users to have the full version of Acrobat to open the filled-in forms. Some departments on campus were reluctant to purchase Acrobat licenses, but that could have been overcome by creative budgeting. A more serious problem was cross platform compatibility. Although the solution worked well for users in the Windows environment, Mac-based users had problems with the ASP pages not rendering properly and piling up on their desktop. Given the large presence of Macintosh users at the university, additional development was necessary to improve platform independence.

The solution was a third generation system that minimized client-side compatibility issues. The system was built with Appligent's server-based FDfMerge and Adobe's FDF Toolkit which extracted content from the database, filled in Acrobat forms and flattened the form fields on the server. Users were now able to view the flattened forms with the ubiquitous Acrobat Reader software and ASP pages were no longer needed.

“The OSP Electronic Grant Proposal System was designed to take the bureaucratic burden off of our researchers and their staff. FDfMerge gave us the tool we needed to build a platform independent automated solution for managing forms.” Said Rich Bredahl Senior Systems Analyst who added, “This is just the beginning, the system will handle thousands of forms.”

The EGPS system has been in development for 2 years and handles all of the OSP reports, the Appligent/Acrobat module accounts for about 50 percent of the forms volume. The system currently handles only internal OSP forms but could be adapted to generate forms for external funders like the National Science Foundation.



About the Office of Sponsored Projects, University of Texas at Austin

The Office of Sponsored Projects (OSP) serves as the coordinating office for externally funded research projects submitted by The University of Texas at Austin. The OSP staff provides technical assistance to Principal Investigators during proposal preparation (budget, special instructions, etc.), serves as an information source for and monitors compliance with applicable University and sponsor policies and requirements, handles all administrative matters with sponsors, including contract negotiations, and serves as a liaison with the Contracts and Grants section of the Office of Accounting during the post-award phases of a project.

About Appligent Inc.

Appligent is the leading provider of server-based production-grade tools for the on-demand customization, manipulation, and delivery of dynamically generated electronic documents. Based in the Philadelphia region, Appligent has provided PDF- related software applications globally since 1994. The company's products are used in a wide variety of industries, including financial services, government, insurance, banking, manufacturing, legal, and pharmaceutical.

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