



Staying ahead of the times

BORLAND ACCELERATES SUCCESS

How Borland is helping Dataflow to gain consistent first-mover advantage in a rapidly changing market

Having been in existence for over 20 years, Dataflow has had to move with the times. The turning point in its history came when it looked to capitalise on market opportunity and move its flagship product to the Windows environment. Borland technology provided the speed and stability the company needed to not only migrate to the new platform, but also to help the company surpass its previous successes.

About Dataflow

Dataflow, an accountancy software specialist, was founded in 1981 in response to a demand for more flexible software capabilities than standard off-the-shelf packages could provide. Focused on the SME market, its software is designed to make accounting, general ledger, financial reporting and commercial tasks less arduous. It achieves this by focusing on ease of use, the ability to interface seamlessly with desktop applications, and unrivalled customisation features that ensure the system is the right fit for the customer.

Dataflow customers include established mid-market organisations including The British Heart Foundation, The British Computer Society, The Chamber of Shipping, The Adult Learning Centre, De La Rue and The Chartered Institute of Housing.

The Problem

In 1995, the company decided on a bold, forward-looking strategy. At the heart of this was the decision to build *dataflow~32*, the first true 32-bit product of its type which was released in 1999 to the UK market, and the only one to be compatible with Microsoft's® SQL Server. This meant moving from the FoxPro® platform to a Windows®-based environment – a change that inevitably required a great deal of adjustment. As Dataflow's managing director, Dariush Mogtader, explains:

“Our existing business management software, dBFLEX, was acknowledged as one of the most versatile accounting systems at the time. We obviously wanted to take the aspects that made our product so successful and transfer them to the new computing environment, creating a brand new system, which would take advantage of all aspects of the Windows environment. Our key objective was to offer comprehensive customisation and interface functions that did not compromise any upgrade path, but at the same time did not involve the publication of source code.”

“There were obvious options to do this, but using a programming language such as C would have been like using a sledgehammer to crack a nut. We therefore looked around the market to see what other options were available.”

The Solution

The Dataflow team evaluated various options available to them and decided on a combination of two Borland solutions, Delphi™ and InterBase™, to form the development environment for its range of next generation products. Delphi allows the quick and easy development of dynamic applications that can be deployed to the Windows environment. InterBase is a high performance, embedded database that helps deliver rapid development and deployment of complex business applications. The principal

FAST FACTS

COMPANY

Dataflow is an accountancy software specialist focused on delivering flexible solutions

PROBLEM

To deliver a fully customisable 32-bit solution to its customers

SOLUTION

Borland Delphi and Borland InterBase allow the easy creation and customisation of solutions to suit customer needs

“Borland has given us the tools to write highly-sophisticated, powerful products. Its value can be judged on our success – our products, built on Borland technology, operate at the heart of £2 billion worth of British industry”.

Dariusz Mogtader, managing director, Dataflow

reasons for this decision were the flexibility and speed that this combination allowed. As David Pipe, technical director at Dataflow, explains:

“The combination of Delphi and InterBase was the only option which provided us with the tools to achieve our goals. Delphi was the only Windows development tool that gave us the speed, power and control we required without resorting to the use of much lower-level programming tools. InterBase provides a robust database platform that is fast and scalable from desktop to Unix mainframe. In fact, the Delphi environment and the power of Object Pascal® allowed us to create software that you would only expect to be able to create using a tool like C.”

Results

Dataflow Windows products, developed with Borland technology, are now used by over 300 companies and 2,500 users across the UK.

“Borland has given us the tools to write highly-sophisticated, highly customisable, powerful products. Its value can be judged on our success – our products now run at the heart of £2 billion worth of British industry,” continued Mogtader.

This was evidenced by The British Heart Foundation, which uses dataflow~32 to monitor its wide range of fundraising activities. Managing a charity with a London headquarters and nine regional offices presents similar challenges to running a good-sized company. In fact, the accounting requirements are exactly the same. But there are some noticeable differences between charities and conventional companies. For example, with no sales and only donations, charities have to pay VAT on purchases but cannot reclaim any VAT back. Like most charities the BHF has specific accounting requirements such as the ability to post recurring debits and credits, charge VAT to cost centres and not the VAT account, reimburse expenses without going through the purchase ledger and nominal ledger cheque writing. But when David Reynolds went looking for a true 32-bit Windows solution and not simply a DOS package with a bolt-on Windows front-end, he was surprised by the lack of choice from the market leaders.

Eventually, the BHF identified three possibilities. “dataflow~32 was the only solution that provided us with the features and flexibility we were used to in our existing system and could meet

all of our new requirements,” says David Reynolds. “Dataflow was the only product that moulded itself around our requirements with ease”.

Dataflow developed a highly flexible system in Delphi to allow the organisation to achieve its aims. An example of this is the fundraising activities around the London to Brighton bike ride. The BHF needed to track a whole raft of data, including riders, the origin of donations and sponsorship, as well as peripheral fundraising activities. These processes were seamlessly linked to the central dataflow~32 accounts so that information could be posted without re-keying or duplications. Equally, a module allowing the organisation to track grants to doctors automatically was built in Delphi, allowing The British Heart Foundation to save time and money by cutting out manual processes.

“We make software which 80 percent of our clients use straight out of the box, but basing it on Borland technology means that it’s easy to adapt and expand to the changing needs of our customers. As more embrace multi-channel commerce, or need to change to adapt to new legislation, this is increasingly important,” Mogtader concludes.

“The flexibility and ease of development Borland brings mean that we’re never caught out by client demands or market changes – a real priority in the mid-market, where companies generally grow quickly. It has also resulted in a product that is flexible and customisable enough that it can adapt to our customers specific changing circumstances.

“In short, Borland allows us to stay a step ahead of our rivals, which gives us a real advantage in a crowded and competitive market.”

DATAFLOW TECHNICAL ENVIRONMENT

Application	Business Management System
Tools	Borland Delphi, InterBase
Other tools evaluated	Visual Basic®, Visual C++®, Powerbuilder®
Platform	Windows NT Server 4.0, Windows 2000 Server
Database server	InterBase, MS SQL
Number of users	2500, across 300 companies
Development team size	5 developers, 5 system testers

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