



Microsoft Technology Center Customer Solution Case Study



Customer: Wisenbaker Builder Services

Web Site: www.wisenbaker.com

Customer Size: Approximately 500

Country or Region: United States

Industry: Manufacturing—Durable consumer goods

Partner: Catapult Systems

Partner Web Site:

www.catapultsystems.com

Customer Profile

Houston, Texas-based Wisenbaker Builder Services prides itself on integrity and reliability in its provision of flooring and countertops for homebuilders across Texas.

Software and Services

- Technologies
 - Microsoft® .NET Framework 3.0
 - Windows® Communication Foundation
 - Windows Presentation Foundation

For more information about other Microsoft customer successes, please visit:

www.microsoft.com/casestudies

Building Supplier Gains Competitive Advantage with Fast Time-to-Market

“I was amazed by the MTC architects’ seemingly limitless ability to explain and demonstrate whichever technologies we asked about and to relate those technologies to our business.”

Richard Gladstone, Chief Information Officer, Wisenbaker Builder Services

Wisenbaker Builder Services wanted to make it faster and easier to calculate project costs for customers and to show them how design choices affect a home’s look. Wisenbaker and Microsoft® Gold Certified Partner Catapult Systems visited a Microsoft Technology Center (MTC) to evaluate new technologies for development. Knowledge gained from the MTC architects is helping Wisenbaker develop a better solution in significantly less time and at a lower cost.

Business Needs

Wisenbaker Builder Services works with homebuilders to provide customers with carpet, hard-surface flooring, countertops, and other finished goods for new houses. The company continually aims to improve the homebuilding experience and further its business. Toward that end, it works closely with ePlan Partners, which provides tailored IT solutions that help Wisenbaker and others in the homebuilding industry better serve their customers.

Wisenbaker sought an improved way to

estimate project costs and to produce an image of materials in a customer’s home. “We wanted to facilitate the home-buying process by immediately calculating accurate costs for customers and showing them a complete picture of a home. That way, they could see how different materials looked and make more informed choices,” explains Richard Gladstone, Chief Information Officer for Wisenbaker and President of ePlan Partners. “But there’s so much data involved in the process that it was impossible to provide an accurate view and cost estimate while a customer waited.”

Wisembaker asked ePlan Partners to develop a comprehensive estimating and imaging solution, with the goal of bringing it to market ahead of competitors. "Because ePlan Partners specializes in back-end systems, we didn't have a lot of expertise in designing the graphical presentation of information, which meant that the project represented a real challenge," recalls Gladstone. The company's programmers began learning to use the Microsoft® .NET Framework 2.0 and Windows® GDI+ to render some basic floor plans.

At the same time, ePlan Partners was working with Microsoft Gold Certified Partner Catapult Systems to resolve a database issue and realized that the partner could help develop the estimating and imaging solution. Catapult consultants recommended that ePlan Partners consider basing its solution on newer technologies. "I wasn't sure about the idea because we tend to take a more traditional approach to our work and don't necessarily look to use the latest and greatest technologies," says Gladstone.

Solution

To overcome those reservations, Microsoft invited Wisembaker, ePlan Partners, and Catapult to the Microsoft Technology Center (MTC) in Austin, Texas. The group participated in a two-day Architecture Design Session, followed by a five-day proof-of-concept engagement, both in November 2006. "I was thrilled with the idea of the MTC. I didn't even know that facilities like that existed," says Gladstone. "What better way to immerse ourselves in the technology that we were examining than to work with the people who created it?"

During the Architecture Design Session, MTC architects worked to understand the Wisembaker business model and map out the

appropriate technologies. Says Gladstone, "I was amazed by the MTC architects' seemingly limitless ability to explain and demonstrate whichever technologies we asked about and to relate those technologies to our business."

The proof of concept provided an opportunity for participants to test 15 specific functions that they wanted the solution to include and that they had identified as potential barriers to deployment. "Everyone was surprised by how easily we could work with the graphical pieces and impressed by the underlying technologies and the range of use options," says Richard Freeman, Project Manager for Catapult Systems.

In addition to getting the chance to ask specific questions and immerse themselves in technologies such as the Microsoft .NET Framework 3.0, Windows Presentation Foundation, and Windows Communication Foundation, participants found that they left the MTC with real results, including a floor-plan tracing application and a design-center application. "Not only were we able to address all 15 functions, we were able to integrate them," says Gladstone. "When we left the MTC, we had two complete applications that already worked together, which we never thought possible in such a short period of time."

Benefits

Wisembaker opted to move forward with the solution based on the new technologies. The time spent at the MTC helped ePlan Partners and Catapult develop their solution for Wisembaker more quickly and cost-effectively, and the solution itself has greater functionality than would have been possible with older technologies.

■ **Faster time-to-market.** The development team is making rapid progress due to the use of new Microsoft technologies and the insight gained from the MTC engagements. "Our previous design would have taken around three years to complete," says Gladstone. "But the MTC showed us that we can have a sellable solution in about one year."

For Wisembaker, that's a critical time difference, especially since this will likely be the first solution of its kind to be introduced to customers. "Everyone says that time is money," says Gladstone. "In this case, it's really true. By getting our solution to market quickly, we'll see an incalculable cost savings because we're getting in ahead of our competition. Being behind the curve could have cost us millions."

■ **Improved solution quality.** "The MTC helped us develop a solution that will be about 1,000 percent more maintainable, and it will give us more robust functionality, presentation, and performance," says Gladstone. "This solution closely models the real world, making it easier for homebuyers to see their flooring and countertop selections within their floor plans, experiment with different choices, and thus make better decisions."

■ **Lower costs, higher return, less risk.** Wisembaker is not only conserving resources in its solution development, but Gladstone also predicts increased sales because of the greater value the company can offer its customers. "The MTC engagements absolutely instilled confidence in the new solution and its development," says Gladstone.