

CASE STUDY

The Society of Authors Simplifies Database Administration and Enhances Membership Services

Industry

Nonprofit

Challenge

An unstable, inflexible database at the heart of many of the society's core processes stood in the way of improving member services.

Results

- Provided convenient web access for staff from standard PCs
- Reduced administrative workload by automating processes and integrating functions
- Eliminated the need for typing lengthy queries

Products

- Rocket[®] UniData

Application

- Database Management

Company

The Society of Authors (SoA) is a nonprofit organization founded in 1884 to protect the interests of professional authors, illustrators, and translators. Headquartered in London, England, the society has more than 9,000 members and associates, with a small staff located at headquarters. The SoA campaigns for authors' rights, negotiates with publishers, and lobbies for changes to copyright and libel laws. Along with hosting meetings and seminars, it publishes a quarterly journal, administers prizes, awards grants, and maintains a database of member specializations.

Challenge

The SoA wanted to offer enhanced services to its growing membership. However, staff found its existing database poorly supported, difficult to use, and too inflexible to be integrated with key member web services. The membership database was at the heart of many of the organization's core processes such as events and merchandising management so its stability and flexibility were vital for the Society's effective operation.

"The first database we installed was problematic in several ways," explained Emma Boniwell, the society's membership secretary. "The initial data migration was faulty, which led to instability further down the line. We didn't receive the levels of support we required from our IT supplier, and we knew that it would be difficult to extend the platform and introduce new functionality. Moreover, the user interface was inconvenient; we had to type in queries manually in order to filter the data. It was time to find a new solution."

Solution

The society worked with APT Solutions, a Rocket[®] U2 business partner specializing in applications for the nonprofit sector. APT's experience in building solutions for trade unions, institutions, clubs, societies, charities, and public bodies led to the development of Stratum, a membership and contact management solution that offers broad functionality out of the box, with the flexibility to be customized for each client's needs.



Nick Osborn, APT Solutions account manager, said, “Stratum is built on the UniData database platform from Rocket Software, using the U2 Web Development Environment and U2 SystemBuilder products. UniData is designed to offer very high levels of performance—even on comparatively low-end hardware—which makes it ideal for not-for-profit organizations operating with a tight IT budget.”

Results

The Society's new solution provided database access through a simple client front-end that could be installed on any standard PC. Employees could connect to the system from a laptop or home office whenever they wanted. The Stratum front-end made it much easier for staff to search and filter the database, eliminating the need to design and type out lengthy queries. “APT Stratum is a very user-friendly system,” said Boniwell. “You can find the information you need with a couple of mouse-clicks, and it is much easier to segment members and manage information.”

Explained Osborn, “UniData is designed to be embedded into applications such as Stratum, reducing the need for database administration and making life easier for non-technical users. The platform is so stable and reliable that the Society of Authors does not need to employ its own IT staff.”

Automation of processes and integration of events and merchandising also reduced the administrative workload. “APT Stratum seemed like an ideal solution, offering not only improved reliability and usability, but also the versatility to adapt to our changing needs in the future,” said Boniwell. “The APT Solutions team's combination of technical expertise and knowledge of the challenges facing not-for-profit organizations has been invaluable, helping us build a solution that is aligned with current best practices.”

APT Solutions also enabled web access to a read-only version of the database, which the Society planned to extend to its members. “Our aim is to give limited access to members via the web, so that they can update their own addresses and contact details,” explained Boniwell. “This will reduce our workload considerably and give us more time to develop richer member services.”

In the future, the Society hopes to work with APT to integrate the new database with its SAGE accounting package and to introduce a new e-commerce solution for merchandising. “This solution from APT and Rocket gives us a stable, reliable and intuitive database platform that is more than capable of handling our day to day needs,” concludes Emma Boniwell. “We are confident that our partnership with APT Solutions will help us deliver even better value to our members.”

“*Rocket UniData is designed to offer very high levels of performance—even on comparatively low-end hardware—which makes it ideal for not-for-profit organizations, such as the Society of Authors, operating with a tight IT budget.*”

Nick Osborn
Account Manager
APT Solutions

-  rocketsoftware.com
-  info@rocketsoftware.com
-  twitter.com/rocket
-  www.youtube.com/rocketsource
-  www.linkedin.com/company/rocket-software
-  www.facebook.com/RocketSoftwareInc
-  blog.rocketsoftware.com

