

IBM Express Runtime and Gillani iDistribute bring real-time performance to ROL Manufacturing

Overview

■ **The Challenge**

Integrate the complex financial and distribution systems from four independent divisions of a major North American automotive parts manufacturer to provide real-time operational information—and maintain business continuity throughout the project

■ **Why IBM?**

IBM Express Runtime offers Business Partners and customers a pre-integrated and preconfigured solution that includes world-class application server, database server and Web server software with a management console, development tools and deployment wizards

■ **The Solution**

ROL Manufacturing deployed financial and enterprise resource planning (ERP) modules from IBM Business Partner Gillani iDistribute running on IBM Express Runtime

■ **Key Benefits**

- *Distribution management system provides real-time information*
- *Integrated financial and ERP modules help increase efficiency, reduce labor*
- *Solution tools help reduce development time and simplify deployment*
- *Enhanced performance of new architecture helps improve response time*



The next time you drive to the grocery store or shopping mall, take a moment to look around the parking lot before you walk inside. If you live in North America, there's a good chance that at least half of the cars in that lot are using a part made by ROL Manufacturing.

Founded in 1962, ROL manufactures original equipment and aftermarket parts for the automobile industry. The ROL family of companies includes ROL Exhaust, the largest North American manufacturer of aftermarket exhaust accessories; ROL Gaskets; Marwil Products; and ROL Industrial, a tier-one supplier to manufacturers of boats and recreational watercraft.

ROL is successful because it can meet the strict technical needs of manufacturers and aftermarket technicians, as well as deliver a broad spectrum of products at competitive prices. "Our

goal is to provide a product for any application that our customers might consider," says Ralph Callisto, vice president of IT for ROL Manufacturing. "Our exhaust products are a great example. We have thousands of part numbers covering hundreds of car and light truck models."

With four divisions pumping out more than 120,000 SKUs over three separate distribution networks (one in the United States, one in Canada and one in Mexico), ROL teams must constantly coordinate and track an enormous volume of rapidly changing product and financial information to keep the business flowing smoothly. "We want to be able to fill orders right away while keeping our operating costs low," explains Callisto. "That means delivering the right number of parts to the right location at the right time."

Key Components

Software

- IBM Express Runtime
 - IBM Informix 4GL
 - IBM Informix Dynamic Server Express
 - IBM WebSphere Application Server - Express
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*—Atif Ahmed
Sales Director
Gillani*

The fact that the ROL divisions operate almost completely independently makes coordination even more challenging. Previously, each division managed its operations through its own financial and ERP systems. Every night, these systems connected to the central ROL financial and distribution systems and uploaded transaction data in batches. ROL staff accessed the product and financial data with customized, text-based applications.

The infrastructure worked, but it generated extra labor. Any task that involved several divisions required extra steps: orders and payments from a single customer would be divided up by ROL office staff and sent manually to the various divisions. ROL executives also found it difficult to get a real-time view of company operations, which hindered strategic planning efforts. “Depending on the data, we might be off 24 or even 48 hours,” says Callisto. “To compensate, we had to build in larger margins of time or materials during our planning sessions, which would increase our operating costs.”

Finding a solution

Executives at ROL wanted to increase efficiency by consolidating the company’s operations—including all of its divisions—on a single, real-time financial and supply chain management platform. “We are adding more users, so we wanted a more responsive system with greater capacity,” says Callisto. “We also wanted a graphical interface and the ability to more directly access our data for real-time analysis, using either a Web application or office applications.”

The ROL Manufacturing IT team evaluated several options, including solutions from Oracle and SAP. However, those packages came loaded with features that, even though the ROL team knew it would never use them, drove up the overall cost.

Instead, the ROL team turned to IBM Business Partner and distribution management specialist Gillani and its iDistribute application, which is based on IBM Express Runtime. “The strength of the supply chain management features in the Gillani offering really stood out,” says Callisto. “It was a much better fit for our business than anything else we saw. We were also familiar with the underlying technology from IBM and very comfortable with that platform.”

Gillani iDistribute is a flexible and robust solution that addresses the challenges of businesses with complex distribution needs. With a suite of integrated modules that cover every aspect of distribution management from ordering through replenishment, iDistribute can deliver fast and accurate transaction processing, responsive budgeting and forecasting and fast execution for real-time reporting. “Gillani iDistribute can support the deep level of product detail critical to manufacturing operations,” says Atif Ahmed, sales director for Gillani. “The suite is tightly integrated, giving customers a single, real-time view of their entire business from any module.”

The iDistribute application is based on IBM Express Runtime, which combines IBM WebSphere® Application Server - Express and Informix® Dynamic Server (IDS) Express. IBM Express Runtime is an integrated tool that helps reduce both costs and deployment labor and helps IBM Business Partners deliver compelling products and services.

ROL Manufacturing planned to transition to iDistribute in stages, beginning with the financial modules. At its Dallas headquarters, Gillani technical staff installed iDistribute and the Financial Management modules on a two-processor IBM System x™ server running Linux®. The Gillani team then sent the server to ROL Manufacturing in Laval, Quebec, where the ROL team integrated it into their network. “When we got the box from Gillani, all we had to do was some minor tweaking, which saved us a lot of time,” adds Callisto.

The ROL team spent three months setting up the data architecture for the new system, then transferred the company’s financial data into iDistribute with help from Gillani technical experts. “We were actually quite a small team, but with the guidance that we received from Gillani, we didn’t need to be any larger. That helped us be efficient with our budget,” says Callisto.

New systems help ROL Manufacturing boost efficiency

With iDistribute powered by IBM Express Runtime, ROL Manufacturing has enhanced its efficiency by more closely integrating its central and divisional financial services. “Our system connects automatically to the divisional finance systems and pulls their information in, which saves time,” says Callisto. “iDistribute also automates a number of processes that were manual, including accounts receivable and accounts payable transactions.”

The ROL team expects to see further productivity improvements as the company moves toward its goal of maintaining a single database that is updated by all the divisions directly. “Having fewer touch points reduces errors and means that our central office staff can focus on more strategic projects,” explains Callisto.

IBM Servers and IBM Express Runtime drive performance

The ROL IT team has seen significant performance improvements thanks to the IBM System x server running IDS Express Server in IBM Express Runtime. “Running on the IBM architecture, the response time that we achieved with iDistribute was impressive,” says Callisto. “IBM and Gillani are helping us both improve the productivity of our central office staff and prepare for future expansion as we add more users.”

“Gillani iDistribute on IBM Express Runtime helps us make better decisions and improve our operating efficiency, which ultimately improves our profit margin.”

*–Ralph Callisto
Vice President of IT
ROL Manufacturing*



Gillani iDistribute delivers real-time supply chain vision

With Gillani iDistribute, the data in the ROL Manufacturing systems now reflects the current situation instead of what was happening a day ago. "Having real-time financial data makes us much more effective during the planning process because we don't have to compensate for data that might be a bit behind," says Callisto. He expects the situation to improve even more as the company rolls out the ERP modules of iDistribute, which will link the ROL divisions more closely and help improve supply-chain visibility. "Gillani iDistribute on IBM Express Runtime helps us make better decisions and improve our operating efficiency, which ultimately improves our profit margin," he adds.

IBM Express Runtime helps reduce acquisition costs and simplify deployment

With IBM Express Runtime, Gillani can deliver world-class IBM middleware to its customers at a significantly lower cost than if the company were to assemble the solution from individual parts. "The IBM Express Runtime package delivers tremendous value to Business Partners, which we can pass on to our customers," says Ahmed. "Basing iDistribute on IBM Express Runtime gives us a real competitive advantage."

IBM Express Runtime also helps reduce the time that it takes for Gillani to set up an iDistribute system by 80 percent. Using the IBM solution, IBM Business Partners can create an image that automatically installs Linux, the supporting IBM middleware and their application in one process. "Previously, performing the basic installation of iDistribute took a week, but with IBM Express Runtime, it only takes one day," says Ahmed. "IBM Express Runtime saves us time, which means that we can serve more customers more effectively and devote more resources to product development."

As ROL Manufacturing continues to implement iDistribute, Callisto is looking forward to further efficiency gains. "The changes that we are making will have a far-reaching impact," says Callisto. "With IBM and Gillani as our partners, we are improving both our operational efficiency and our ability to forecast distribution requirements, which makes us a better supplier, and better able to serve our customers."

For more information

For more information about IBM Express Runtime, please contact your IBM sales representative or IBM Business Partner, or visit ibm.com/software/webservers/expressruntime

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