

THE BACKGROUND

With the summer 2003 opening of its new tower addition, The Venetian Resort-Hotel-Casino, Las Vegas, became the world's third-largest hotel, with 4,049 rooms – all suites. Its facilities include 1.75 million square feet of meeting space; two ballrooms totaling nearly 100,000 square feet; 200,000 square feet of gaming space; the famous Grand Canal Shoppes and its gondola rides; 16 restaurants; and showrooms. The suites are enabled with voice mail, fax and modem hookups, high speed internet access, printers, copiers and three telephones, in addition to the usual hotel amenities.

Behind the scenes, an extensive array of technology supports the impressive menu of services and activities, including hardware and software systems that automate the generation and distribution of the many business forms used in its operations, as well as its payroll and accounts payable checks.

THE PROBLEM

But four years after The Venetian opened in 1999, heavy usage in printing its set of 20-plus business forms on a constant basis, as well as more than 5,600 payroll and hundreds of accounts payable checks each week had exacted its toll. The laser printers that output the documents and checks had begun to wear out, but replacing them would not be simple. The software system in use was designed to output only to specific models of laser printers, and additional programming would probably be necessary if newer printers were brought in.

THE SOLUTION

After considering multiple alternatives, The Venetian's IT department Software Development Manager, Drew Courtney found the answer in two software systems developed by ACOM Solutions, Inc.:

- **EZeDocs/400** -- an electronic document design, production and distribution solution.
- **EZPayManager/400** -- a comprehensive payment management solution, with both MICR laser printer and electronic payment capabilities.

Both solutions are host-resident on the iSeries (AS/400) and allow users to replace preprinted checks and document forms with electronic templates.

When a document is needed, data from The Venetian's financial/ERP system is merged with the appropriate document template and spooled out to a laser printer, or distributed electronically. (Electronic delivery options for documents include automated fax, email, secure web posting, PDF conversion and electronic archiving.)

Payments are generated in a similar manner, with check production on MICR laser printers, or sent via electronic distribution directly to recipient accounts through the banking industry's ACH network. Payment Details can be printed or distributed electronically via automated fax, secure email, or secure web posting. Payments can even be electronically archived.

THE IMPLEMENTATION

At The Venetian, EZPayManager/400 and EZeDocs/400 are installed on three AS/400 computers, accepting data from **SSA Global Technologies' Infinium 2000 financial management software**; InterAmerican Data's LMS Lodging Management System, the primary hotel operations software; the Advanced Casino Systems Corporation (ACSC) casino management system; and the Stratton-Warner inventory system. One AS/400 Model S30 is online and one is offline, mirroring the active system. The third, an AS/400 Model 170, is used for development and training.

In selecting the ACOM solutions, Courtney made up a "Ben Franklin" chart, listing the advantages of each solution in columns, and then making a comparison.

"ACOM had more flexibility and functionality, and the technology had been developed from the ground up to run in the iSeries environment," Courtney says. "It was not a difficult decision."

Courtney purchased the two ACOM software solutions in April 2003 and employed ACOM's professional services team to design and implement the front desk registration form. The system previously in use also used electronic templates or overlays. "And when the ACOM forms went into service, the front desk staff didn't even notice a difference, because they looked so similar," he says.

From that beginning, the programming staff took over the design duties. Courtney designed and put into service the "folio" form (the hotel industry term for the checkout statement). Next, he designed and implemented the W2G form, used to report jackpots to the IRS. Currently in work is the 1042S form, which is used to report jackpot wins by foreigners to governments where such treaty agreements regarding taxation are in place.

Not long after The Venetian installed the ACOM solutions, the design process was simplified further. ACOM introduced their new PC-resident **EZDesigner/400** GUI-based drag-and-drop design software, and The Venetian immediately acquired it.

“It is a marvelous tool,” says Courtney. “Before, we could design the forms using the same method, but once we transferred the templates to the iSeries computer, any further modifications had to be accomplished using the iSeries’ X-Y on-screen coordinates. **With EZDesigner/400, we can transfer the templates bi-directionally any time we need to make a change or want to add something to the form.”**

EZDesigner/400’s advanced capabilities proved especially valuable when Courtney and his staff began implementing payroll and accounts payable checks on EZPayManager/400. The Venetian required nine different check templates and two accounts payable check templates, representing a total of 11 accounts at Bank of America in San Francisco and in Atlanta. ACOM’s professional services staff was again called upon to design the first template, using an existing form from The Venetian as a model, after which Courtney’s staff took over.

“ACOM’s professional services personnel trained us on how to do it and I assigned the task to one of my programmers, who completed it in a week,” Courtney says. “The sensitivity of EZDesigner/400 is amazing. The iSeries/400 computer allows you to adjust lines to within 1/1000th of an inch, and EZDesigner/400 positions elements with the same degree of precision. Our new checks passed muster at the banks the first time.”

“Checks are produced in the payroll and accounts payable departments, and they are the responsibility of those departments,” Courtney says. Checks are printed on blank security check stock and then inserted automatically into envelopes by a stuffer-sealer machine. Payroll is distributed in the workplace locations, while accounts payable checks go out through conventional mail.

“We are not a ‘DP shop’,” Courtney says. “Our job is to design, develop and maintain applications that our user departments control.”

Security is always an issue, one that casino operators must be especially conscious of. According to Courtney, tight security is built into the management software in use at The Venetian as well as in the ACOM solutions, which feature multiple levels of password-controlled access and a comprehensive set of administrative reports.

SUCCESS!

Now, with the disbursement process implemented fully, Courtney and the programming group is moving forward with the rest of the forms.

“EZDesigner/400 will make it an easy and enjoyable process, much like an on-screen game,” Courtney says.

“Our programmers are among our highest-paid people,” he says. “When they can do their work faster and better, our department can accomplish more at lower costs, which ultimately is reflected on the bottom line. We have not measured our operating cost reductions yet, but we plan to do so in about six months. We think that we will identify some major savings.”

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