

MD Success Story



Auto Auction Industry Innovator Transforms Software Distribution



www.midrangedynamics.com



MIDRANGE DYNAMICS
providing innovative IBM i solutions

Software Developer Auction Edge Gains Robust Distribution & Flexible Rollback with Midrange Dynamics Change Management

There comes a time for many software development shops when their own internally developed processes and tools are no longer sufficient to handle critical change management and software distribution functions. This recently became evident for the IBM i development team at Auction Edge, the creator of EDGE ASI, an IBM i-based software solution that helps its customers in the commercial automobile-auction industry comprehensively manage all aspects of their auctions—from inventory to accounting to documentation.



Kelly Miller, a developer on the EDGE ASI team, was spending as much as 36 hours over the course of a weekend to distribute software updates for EDGE ASI to Auction Edge's customers. Given that EDGE ASI typically distributes software updates two weekends per month, this was becoming an untenable situation.

"What was especially time-consuming for me was having to manually go through and determine if each update had been installed correctly at each customer site," says Kelly. "I had to log in to each customer and check for issues, and if an issue was discovered, I had to manually roll back the update and initiate a trouble-shooting process to find and resolve the underlying cause. With 100-plus EDGE ASI customers across the U.S. and Canada, the process was eating up my weekends."

Not only was the EDGE ASI software distribution process becoming increasingly troublesome, so were the team's internal processes of managing

changes to the software. With a team of nearly 20 developers working on EDGE ASI and a growing number of test and beta environments, the complexity was exceeding what their own internal processes could handle. It became clear to Kelly and the rest of the team that a comprehensive, third-party change management solution was needed. After looking at several of the offerings on the market, MDCMS from Midrange Dynamics stood out from the rest in large part because of its robust and flexible software distribution capabilities.

"I remember during the demo how excited the EDGE ASI team became when we started showing them the software distribution management features of MDCMS, recalls Donna Westmoreland, technical pre-sales and support manager at Midrange Dynamics North America. "The team could see right away that MDCMS contained exactly what they needed to address some of their biggest headaches."

A Custom-Tailored Approach

Auction Edge chose MDCMS not only because of the many features that would resolve the distribution and software change management challenges that the EDGE ASI team was facing. It was also clear that Midrange Dynamics was committed to tailoring the MDCMS product, as well as its training and implementation processes,

specifically to their needs.



"We never take a cookie cutter approach with customers," says Donna. "We work to understand a customer's

development environment and then fine-tune our software and training, so the customer can get maximum benefit. This is especially the case when



customers like Auction Edge are moving from a less-structured development environment, in which they are using their own tools, to one that is more structured by virtue of utilizing our comprehensive change management software.”

Automated Rollbacks & Centralized Management

The single feature in MDCMS that made the biggest difference for Auction Edge was the ability of the solution to automatically undo, or “roll back,” any EDGE ASI software update that was distributed to any customer in which MDCMS detected an issue.

“With MDCMS we are now able to define our software deployment processes exactly to our specifications and create automated deployment systems that eliminate the chance for human error.”

Kelly Miller, Application Developer, Edge ASI

“The rollback feature alone has personally saved me at least eight hours every weekend in which we do a distribution,” says Kelly. “With MDCMS, not only can I schedule the distribution to run fully unattended, which was huge for us, the system also automatically detects any issues that occur with the EDGE ASI software-update process and then rolls everything back to the way things were before the update. The customer never knows there was an issue.”

With MDCMS, not only can rollbacks occur automatically, but manual rollbacks can be initiated should something be discovered that needs attention after an otherwise successful update. Plus, manual rollbacks can be defined to be very granular, so only specific objects are affected. The granularity works in the other direction as well—for instance, when patches need to be deployed for specific objects and/or specific customers.

“With MDCMS, we are now able to define our software-deployment processes exactly to our specifications and create automated deployment systems that eliminate the chance for human

error,” says Kelly. “MDCMS lets us know prior to any software deployment exactly what is needed for each customer or set of customers, which further reduces potential for error. Before MDCMS, we would need to keep track of all of these things on our own. MDCMS is a truly multifaceted tool, and its extensive logging capabilities have been a tremendous help to me whenever an issue occurs with a distribution.”

“The centralized software distribution capabilities of MDCMS have been a huge time-saver as I no longer need to log into each customer to implement the update or to check on the status of an update,” continues Kelly. “All logs from each customer are automatically brought into a central repository within MDCMS. When I come in on Monday morning after a scheduled weekend software distribution, MDCMS shows me any issues that arose during the distribution and gives me very specific information about what went wrong, so I can correct things quickly and reschedule the update.”

Benefits of Change Management & the “Gold Standard”

In addition to providing valuable software distribution features, MDCMS helps Auction Edge manage all its internal software-change processes for EDGE ASI. Along with preventing one developer from overwriting the work of another, MDCMS handles all of the various development and quality-control stages for EDGE ASI, ensuring that a program never gets distributed to a customer before it has been fully tested and approved for deployment. In fact, Auction Edge





has configured MDCMS so that, at a certain stage of the development process, the system does a test deployment to one of its own production environments, which allows the development team to see in advance any possible software distribution issues before the new release goes out to customers. This provides yet another way to reduce the potential for problems during distributions.

“Policies enforced by the tool help us formalize our entire development and distribution process, which has reduced errors and saved us a significant amount of time.”

Darren Hayes, Development Manager, Edge ASI

Prior to the EDGE ASI team deciding on MDCMS, the team had been making efforts to integrate as many software customization features as possible within the EDGE ASI application. In other words, the goal was to create a standardized “gold” version of the application to reduce the number of customers that needed a customized version of the software. With the acquisition of MDCMS, this effort was significantly accelerated.

“Our goal was that, within a year of acquiring MDCMS, we would complete our gold version, have a majority of our customers running it, and use the tool to manage deployments for all gold version customers,” adds Kelly. “But everything worked so smoothly with MDCMS that we were able to achieve this goal in less than six months.”

“Today we have over 70% of our customers on the gold version of the software, and we are working to increase this number,” says Darren Hayes, development manager for the EDGE ASI product. “This has dramatically streamlined our software distribution process, particularly because with MDCMS we can create groups based on a variety of criteria, such as customers, software versions, objects that have been customized, etc. For instance, we have groups based on what modules are installed or whether a customer is on our gold version. MDCMS allows us to manage

programs and versions as well as distribute updates in any way that’s required,” continues Darren. “Policies enforced by the tool help us formalize our entire development and distribution process, which has reduced errors and saved us a significant amount of time.

A Collaborative Relationship

MDCMS is truly a game-changer for the EDGE ASI development team, but an added bonus is the close collaboration they have with the technical team at Midrange Dynamics. “The responsiveness of the entire Midrange Dynamics team has been impressive,” says Darren. “Their willingness to help us with the challenges we face in our development and distribution processes as well as the way they listen to our suggestions—and often incorporate them—is very refreshing when compared to some other software vendors.”

“...the best thing about finding Midrange Dynamics and MDCMS is I got a big part of my weekends back!”

Kelly Miller

“We feel like Auction Edge is a true partner,” adds Donna. “The folks on the EDGE ASI team reach out to us not only with questions, but also with many great ideas as they seek to try new things with MDCMS. Their active involvement and unique perspective have given us opportunities to enhance the product, which has benefitted Auction Edge as well as other MDCMS customers.”

“The support we receive from Midrange Dynamics is outstanding,” adds Kelly. “It’s clear that they sincerely want to help us and their other customers be successful with their software. In a nutshell, the best thing about finding Midrange Dynamics and MDCMS is I got a big part of my weekends back!”

Resources:

www.midrangedynamics.com

www.md-na.com

