

Ward Transport Gains Competitive Edge with MDRest4i



The shipping and logistics industry is highly competitive - the difference between winning or losing a contract often hinges on the ability to provide instant pricing information. For Ward Transport & Logistics Corporation, a Pennsylvania-based trucking company serving much of the eastern United States, pricing is based on extremely fluid variables that can literally change on a moment-by-moment basis.

"To get new business it's critical that we're able to rapidly calculate and provide pricing," says Mike Zupon, Ward Transport's vice president of technology. "If we can't provide a pricing quote within seconds, then we won't even get a chance to play."

Companies that need their freight moved often use third-party, cloud-based applications that interface via APIs to numerous transport companies. Companies can quickly choose the carrier that provides the best rate and delivery time. This makes for a highly competitive marketplace.

"Our profit margins are slim," says Mike. "If we can make a profit while improving our load capacity and volumes through tweaking the discounts we're able to provide to customers, it makes all the difference to our efficiency and our bottom line."



THE CHALLENGE OF CONSUMING API DATA IN RPG- BASED ERP APPLICATIONS

The dynamic pricing application that Ward Transport utilizes takes into account a multitude of company defined variables. However, these dynamic-pricing capabilities must be integrated through APIs with the ERP applications that run on Ward Transport's IBM i systems.

"We knew that it was going to be a challenge to consume API data directly into our RPG-based ERP applications," says Ray Taylor, a technology manager at Ward Transport. "We're a PHP shop, running the Zend PHP stack directly on the IBM i. PHP works well because it can call RPG to access anything on the IBM i."

"Unfortunately, RPG doesn't easily call PHP. If you're sitting in an RPG program and you want to consume an API, it's a very complicated process without the right tools."

"That began our search for a well-supported, well-documented tool that could give us a way to simplify the integration of APIs into our native IBM i ERP applications written in RPG."

After exploring the IBM i marketplace for an API solution that could meet the company's needs, Ray found that his options were limited.

“We looked at three vendors who provided solutions in this area,” continues Ray. “Only MDRest4i from Midrange Dynamics provided a solution in which our RPG developers could create the needed REST APIs entirely in RPG. For us, that’s huge.”



DEVELOPERS USE THEIR EXISTING KNOWLEDGE OF RPG TO BUILD AND RUN APIS

MDRest4i eliminates the middleware that would otherwise be required with API tools that depend on running an emulated PASE environment. These layers of middleware affect performance while making troubleshooting more difficult and introducing potential security vulnerabilities.

MDRest4i is built from the ground up in RPG, which means it performs many times faster than PASE-dependent solutions. It allows programmers with RPG, COBOL, and SQL skills to utilize REST APIs to quickly and easily build integration with their IBM i applications.

“The MDRest4i SDK is designed to accelerate learning, building, generating, and deploying REST APIs and clients,” says Stuart Milligan, Midrange Dynamics’s chief solution architect for MDRest4i. “This means developers can focus on coding and maintaining business logic, using their existing RPG skills and knowledge in a very natural way.”

“We’re very impressed with the forms-based UI of the MDRest4i SDK Console,” says Ray. “It not only imports the API definitions we need, but when those definitions are combined with additional configuration information, the tool automatically produces around 80 percent of the RPG program that’s needed to create the request program. This is remarkable. No other software vendor we evaluated had functionality that was anything close to what MDRest4i provides.”



STAND-OUT SUPPORT FROM MIDRANGE DYNAMICS

The way Midrange Dynamics provides support and delivers enhancements has also impressed Ray.

“The support I’ve received from Midrange Dynamics is second to none,” says Ray. “I cannot say enough good things about the MDRest4i support team. I’ve never asked a question where I didn’t get a prompt, detailed answer. And Midrange Dynamics has even made enhancements to the tool based on things that I’ve suggested.”

“The more we use MDRest4i, the more we discover projects we can do that will save us time and money. It has truly opened up a world of possibilities for us to utilize the valuable data residing in our IBM i applications.”