MySQL Helps Simply Accounting by Sage Increase Revenue, Market Share, and Customer Satisfaction

Business Management Software

Hardware: Intel-based, 2 GHz processor or higher

OS - Client: Windows 2000, XP, Vista

OS - Server: Windows Server 2003, Small Business Server 2003, Windows Server 2008, Red Hat Enterprise Linux 5, SUSE Linux Enterprise Server 10

Database: MySQL 5.0.38

Language: C#.NET, C++.NET

"MySQL was the highest performing database all-around, and was certainly head and shoulders above the rest in meeting our requirements, especially with respect to perform- ance. "

You-Sheng Kang, Director of Research and Development, Simply Accounting by Sage

Simply Accounting by Sage Overview

The Sage Group plc, is one of the world-wide market leaders in accounting and business management software and services for small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs), with over 5.8 million customers and 14,500 employees in more than 26 countries. Sage thinks global and acts local: despite its global reach, the majority of Sage products and services are developed and supported locally to provide the highest service levels and better support the country-specific legislation and regulations surrounding accounting, payroll and human resources.

In the Canadian market, Simply Accounting by Sage is the established market share leader in the small to mid-size business accounting software market with 54% of the Canadian retail market[1]. Simply Accounting retains its market lead through its innovative, highly customer-focused technology and business practices.

Multi-language and multi-currency support In Canada, it is common to conduct business in both English and French and in both Canadian and American Dollars – often interchangeably. Unlike other accounting software, each Simply Accounting product has native support for multiple languages and currencies to meet the local market needs.

Accounting integrity Simply Accounting products strictly follow accounting rules to ensure users can easily create reports and demonstrate regulatory compliance. In addition, they are designed so that accounts can't get out of balance.

Number one accountant-recommended Simply Accounting by Sage is the software most recommended by accountants in Canada. With more than 10,000 accountant partners, Simply Accounting has more than twice as many as its closest competitor.

Number one in education Simply Accounting is taught in over 66% of all schools in Canada and in 80% of all colleges, accessing approximately 300,000 students across the country.

High customer satisfaction Simply Accounting pays very close attention to its "Net Promoter Score®", a measure of customers' willingness to recommend a product or service that has been shown to be highly correlated to revenue growth. In 2008, Simply Accounting's Net Promoter score was 45% while the average score in the software industry was 10%.

1 Canadian Accounting Software Market, NPD, January 2009

The Business Challenge

Simply Accounting by Sage had been using the Microsoft Jet Database engine[2] within its products. In 2007, they started to experience problems and limitations with Jet:

Data Corruption

In 2007, Microsoft announced that it would no longer update Jet as part of Windows' updates. As a result, existing issues like data corruption caused by reboots when Windows automatically downloaded updates were not going to be addressed by Microsoft. Because many customers left their Simply Accounting applications open all the time, "whenever Windows did an update, we would get a flood of calls. Even though this was not our fault, Simply Accounting took the blame. This is what really brought to light our need for a new database." said You-Sheng Kang, Director Research and Development, Simply Accounting by Sage.

Growing Customers' Needs Unmet

In addition, "We found that 11% of Simply Accounting's customers were large and outgrowing Jet's capabilities. Two-thirds of these 11% said they wanted to stay with Simply Accounting but they weren't ready to upgrade to Sage Accpac (mid-market ERP software)," said Jamie Sutherland, Vice President and General Manager, Simply Accounting by Sage. "Sage wanted to retain these customers and appeal to new customers whose needs fell in a gap between Sage's home/small business and mid-market applications. We needed a more scalable, high performance database, with greater capacity and the ability to handle concurrent users."

Sage Cross-Product Line Integration

The third reason to change databases was to enable Sage cross-product integration. "Sage provides a choice of local offerings, designed to meet different customer needs, under a global brand. We had the opportunity to drive richer integration by standardizing on one database across a number of Sage products. We could see the cross-selling opportunities that would be created by combining Sage products, many of which are leaders in their respective markets, " said Jamie.

"With MySQL, we're in a much better place than when we started. Customer satisfaction is even higher now, the [new] Simply Accounting by Sage Enterprise version was made possible because of MySQL, and we are able to scale with our customers' needs."

You-Sheng Kang, Director Research and Development, Simply Accounting by Sage

The MySQL Solution

Selecting MySQL for Simply Accounting and the Sage Database Standard

Sage decided to leverage and expand on Simply Accounting's database evaluation and testing to find a database standard that could be used across the Sage product portfolio. After careful research, You-Sheng Kang, and the evaluation team decided on the following database requirements:
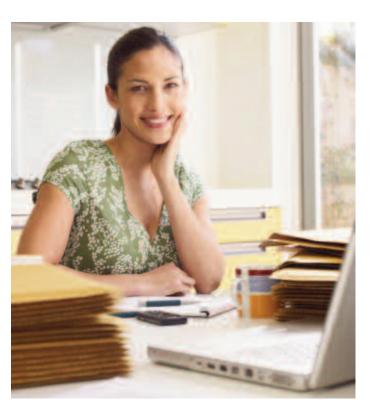
Business Requirements

- **Maintain high Net Promoter score** Continue to focus on product quality to maintain or improve on Simply Accounting's high Net Promoter score of 45%.
- **Retain growing customers and enter new market segment** Meet the needs of existing, growing customers with capabilities that would also allow Simply Accounting to tap into the accounting low to mid-market segment
- **Deliver extreme ease-of-use and technology "invisibility"** Simply Accounting's customers are business users who generally do not have in-house technical support. "Our customers want their applications to just work, to solve their business problems and improve efficiency; they don't want to know how or why," said You-Sheng.

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2 Jet has been used as the underlying database engine for both Microsoft Access and Visual Basic.

Technical Requirements

- **Support for current schema** for easier migration.
- **Multi-user support** to address the needs of growing SMBs.
- **Subquery and transaction support.**
- **Windows and ADO.NET support.**
- **Small footprint.**
- **Zero end-user administration** so that configuration, installation, and granting and revoking of security rights can be done as part of the application's installation and configuration.
- **High performance** to meet their customers' high and growing expectations.
- **Scalability** to perform as well with 50,000 records as with just one.
- **Support for Unicode**, for double-byte characters like Chinese and others to accommodate future needs.
- **X-Copy capabilities** so their customers could copy files across a network as an e-mail attachment.
- **"Learnability"** so Sage developers could quickly and easily learn how to develop and integrate their applications with the database.

Database Evaluation

You-Sheng and his team selected nine databases to evaluate that were already in use within Sage products and/or appeared to be capable of meeting their requirements.

The Evaluation Process

The evaluation team created an exhaustive, three-round process of elimination to find the database that could meet Simply Accounting's and other Sage products' needs. "Because Simply Accounting and Sage have so many customers, we needed to test the heck out of these databases to find the one that could meet their and our needs now and in the future."

Round One was an evaluation of all of the databases against all of the above-listed requirements. At the conclusion, four of the databases were eliminated for reasons that included: difficult installation, poor sub-query and transaction performance, lack of ADO.NET or Unicode support, and a crash after just 2000 records.

Rounds Two and Three tested the remaining five databases' performance, scalability and multi-user access capabilities. There were twelve tests in all, each a different permutation of Reads, Simple Writes and Complex Write performance on three different systems: 1) the minimal hardware requirements[3], 2) the recommended hardware[4], 3) over a network on the recommended hardware.

The results of rounds two and three proved that "MySQL was the highest performing all-around and the rest dropped out along the way," said You-Sheng, "we were very impressed with MySQL."

MySQL was "above the rest"

After all of their testing and evaluation, You-Sheng concluded, "MySQL was certainly head and shoulders above the rest in meeting our requirements, especially with respect to performance."

In addition, You-Sheng and his team valued the following MySQL attributes:

- **Open source** While this had not been a criterion, they saw it as a plus and a form of insurance: if they needed a fix, there was a high likelihood that Sun or the MySQL community would address it and open source gave Simply Accounting the freedom to fix it themselves.
- **Learn-ability** "MySQL was very easy to learn. Though he had no prior experience with MySQL, one programmer wrote the new driver for MySQL in under two months. And, when we were optimizing and re-writing queries there wasn't even a bump in the road," said You-Sheng.
- **Zero Administration or Maintenance** "We liked that administration can be hidden entirely with MySQL and there is zero separate maintenance," said You-Sheng.

3 Minimum: Pentium III, 128 mg RAM, 1 gig disk space
4 Recommended: Pentium 4, 512mg RAM, 8 gig disk space

The Benefits of Using MySQL

MySQL has provided Simply Accounting and Sage with the following benefits:

Access to New Market Segment and Increased Revenue

With MySQL's performance and scalability, Sage has been able to release an "Enterprise" version that filled a gap between their home/small office accounting and mid-market ERP products. Simply Accounting by Sage Enterprise was launched in October 2008 and, within three months, comprised 10% of Simply Accounting's overall revenue.

New Product and Revenue Through Cross-Product Line Integration

Sage (UK) Limited's HR software, Sage 50 HR, had already been using MySQL. Because both Simply Accounting's products and Sage 50 HR were standardized on MySQL, Sage has been able to integrate the two products to create a Simply Accounting by Sage HR software application for the Canadian market in under five months.

A New Sage Product Database Standard

MySQL is the new Sage database standard for Sage's SMB targeted products if and when they change from their existing databases. At present this includes Simply Accounting by Sage in Canada, Sage 50 HR in the UK and Sage's GS product line in Germany.

Higher Net Promoter Score

Within one year of changing to MySQL, Simply Accounting's Net Promoter score was even higher than the year before, despite a series of challenges when they first released the new version (see "Lessons Learned").

Growing Customers' Needs Met

Microsoft Jet engine's lack of scalability had been particularly problematic for Simply Accounting's retail customers. With MySQL, Simply Accounting's inventory control product can now easily scale to handle tens of thousands of inventory items.

Solution Summary

MySQL has met or exceeded Simply Accounting and Sage's requirements. "With MySQL, we're in a much better place than when we started," said You-Sheng Kang, Director Research and Development, Simply Accounting by Sage. "Customer satisfaction is even higher now, the [new] Enterprise version was made possible because of MySQL, and we are able to scale with our customers' needs."

They've been pleased with the way in which MySQL attributes and capabilities align with Simply Accounting's. "I don't think we would have made any other choice. MySQL supports Simply Accounting's main value propositions: Simply Accounting works hard to be the number one recommended accounting package by accountants, customers and schools. We strive to deliver products to customers that solve their business problems and improve their efficiency, while at the same time being technology savvy – modern and agile. We have a large portfolio of products that can grow with our customers and we are better able to do all of these things with MySQL," said Jamie Sutherland, Vice President and General Manager, Simply Accounting by Sage.

Lessons Learned

Simply Accounting by Sage's October 2007 release, which first included MySQL, faced a series of new version challenges:

- In the same release, Simply Accounting moved to .NET, made changes to the user interface (UI) and Microsoft released a Windows update on the same day that created many simultaneous demands on their customers.
- They discovered that many of their customers had a large number of invalid records in Jet, caused by, for example, files that had been sent over a network or a machine shut down mid-write. These files had to be corrected before they could be read and migrated.

Simply Accounting by Sage was able to overcome these challenges and even improve their Net Promoter score just after its October 2008 release. Based on their experiences, You-Sheng and his team offer the following advice:

- **Anticipate a customer learning curve** With any product changes, regardless of preparation, anticipate increased support calls.
- **Do a lot of testing** Simply Accounting by Sage tested their October 2008 version extensively, including sending it to over 100 customers before they launched the product.
- **Tools Help** Simply Accounting by Sage built a tool to automatically detect and repair invalid records in Jet and it's now a part of the product update process.
- **Keep schema intact** To minimize risks, they kept the schema intact from Jet to MySQL.

MySQL Embedded Server for OEMs, ISVs, and VARs

MySQL Embedded Server is a full-featured, zero administration database that enables ISVs and OEMs to bring their applications and solutions to market faster. MySQL's small footprint, zero administration and support for 20+ platforms give ISVs and OEMs ultimate flexibility to ship a highly reliable SQL compliant, transactional database with just about any software application or hardware appliance.

MySQL Embedded Server enables OEM/ISV/VARs to:

- **Reduce COGS and improve profitability** by embedding a cost-effective database without artificial license restrictions on CPU, memory, and servers

- **Bring applications to market faster** by embedding a proven database rather than building and maintaining a proprietary database in-house

- **Deliver a differentiated solution** that can capture, store and report on data with speed and granularity by embedding a full-featured, relational database

- **Win competitive comparisons** using a SQL compliant, relational database with superior performance and reliability

- **Deliver a Zero Administration solution** so that customers don't have to hire dedicated DBA resources

- **Make reporting and analysis easy** using cost-effective open source reporting solutions like Jasper for MySQL: OEM Edition.

MySQL Embedded Server is Ideally Suited for:

Software Applications

- Network & Performance Management
- Monitoring Systems
- CRM & ERP
- Educational Software
- Email, Anti-spam software
- VoIP & Online Messaging
- Healthcare & Practice Management
- Biotech

Hardware Appliances

- Networking Equipment
- Routers & Traffic Controllers
- Security Appliances
- Retail Kiosks
- Point-of-Sale (POS) Systems
- Diagnostic Instruments
- Sensory Devices
- And more...

About MySQL

MySQL is the most popular open source database software in the world. Many of the world's largest and fastest-growing organizations use MySQL to save time and money powering their high-volume Web sites, critical business systems, and packaged software.

For more information about MySQL, please go to **www.mysql.com**.

To contact MySQL online or via telephone, please go to **www.mysql.com/contact**.

The World's Most Popular Open Source Database

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