

SouthWare Fosters Excellence Through Innovation and Service



Industry:	Wide variety of industries
Current Environment:	Windows®, Linux®, UNIX, AIX
Application:	Financial, Management Information, and Relationship Management Software
Acucorp Solutions:	COBOL-based GUI development; Thin Client; Distributed Computing; Data access from popular office suites; RDBMS access
Previous Environment:	DOS, Windows, UNIX, AIX
Previous COBOL:	ICOBOL, RM/COBOL™



PARTNERS IN SUCCESS

By Sharman Nichols

If you've ever driven a car with a failing water pump, you know how important warning indicators can be. Engine overheating? Oil pressure too low? When that warning light flashes on your automobile dashboard, you most likely respond with quick, corrective action—thus avoiding a potentially hazardous situation.

Imagine how helpful it would be if businesses could rely on conspicuous "dashboard indicators" to avoid wrong turns. An indicator would light up on a computer display, the business would respond quickly and appropriately, and trouble would be avoided. This futuristic-sounding capability is today's reality for customers of SouthWare Innovations, Inc., in Auburn, Alabama.

SouthWare's TaskWise® system belongs to a new category of business software that wraps around other business applications and corporate data. Running in the background, it tracks business performance against criteria provided by the business managers. TaskWise

triggers a warning and makes related task assignments whenever exceptions occur. Built-in software monitors allow management to track employee responses.

It's no surprise that SouthWare, who's been creating and selling groundbreaking business software since 1984, would develop such an innovative solution. According to Tim Sanders, Executive Vice President, "SouthWare combines traditional, proven accounting techniques with state-of-the-art technology to give our customers the best overall accounting software available. As new technology becomes available, we proactively adapt it to different businesses."

Portability Provides the Foundation

Using advanced application development technologies from Acucorp, Inc.,

SouthWare offers its Excellence Series™ software on more than 600 hardware/operating system combinations, including Windows NT/2000/98/95, Linux, UNIX, AIX, and networks such as Novell, all built from one set of source code comprising over three million lines of code.

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—Rick Hulsey, SouthWare

According to Vice President Rick Hulsey, "We determined fairly early that we could expand our business if we switched to a more portable tool set. By far the single best technical decision we've made since 1984 was to switch to Acucorp's software tools. We certainly wouldn't be where we are today if we had not made that choice. We've saved on development costs because of the efficiencies we've gained, and we've been able to get products to market more quickly."

Sanders adds, "We have dealers who sell only for Linux or UNIX or only for Windows, but more and more deliver solutions on whichever operating systems the customer prefers. Using Acucorp's tools enables us to support them all with one set of source code."

Innovation a Guiding Philosophy

Since its inception, SouthWare has made it a priority to adopt new environments and new technologies, bringing its customers the benefits of each innovation.

In Sanders' words, "When the Web became more important to people, we knew we needed to have an e-business capability. A high percentage of the same processes that people can do at their workstations they now want to do from remote offices, or while they're on travel, or via an intranet. Our dealers wanted us to add this capability, and they tell us they were amazed at the richness of the solutions we delivered."

"We've also added a graphical front end to our business solutions and provided access to relational databases, and we support many network processing options, in addition to the e-business capabilities. We did all of this in COBOL, with Acucorp's technology. There are no languages other than COBOL used anywhere in our product line. Web support, graphical frontends, database access, distributed processing, flexible reporting, and customizable data structures—it's all done in COBOL. Not only does this preserve our products' portability, it also enables us to manage development costs. We're proud to have retained our experienced development team for many years."

Customization Without Licensing Source Code

Tim Sanders emphasizes the importance of giving the end user choices.

"Sometimes the person who operates the software feels like using a mouse, and other times that's not the most efficient way to go. Our end users can choose, person by person, function by function, whether they prefer keystroke mode or mouse mode. These sorts of choices exist at nearly every level."

Many SouthWare® solutions offer users the ability to customize while remaining compatible with the standard version of the software. This means that a later upgrade does not overwrite the customizations.

For example, with Extended Data™ the users can add new data fields to standard files, create their own prompts and defaults, add new search keys to their master files, and create simple stand-alone databases.

SouthWare Forms™ allows users to tailor their accounting forms to fit their needs. WorkFlow™ provides the capability to insert custom logic into the flow of data while remaining compatible with the standard version.

Skillful software engineering by SouthWare enables users to tailor the applications to suit their needs, but they don't pay a penalty for doing that. Their changes continue to work when they later apply standard upgrades.

Building for the Future

Currently SouthWare is in the process of adopting Acucorp's newest technology, Thin Client, which enables a Windows client to display the user interface from a business program running on a remote server (either Windows NT/2000 or Linux/UNIX).

According to Hulse, "Our dealers see significant value in having a thin client mode to offer their customers, and that's why we have eagerly adopted Acucorp's Thin Client facility. You can

deliver the software on a solid, reliable server and still give the users mouse and graphical capabilities, as well as an interface to office productivity suites such as Microsoft® Office, StarOffice™, and OpenOffice.org. So you have reliable back-room performance and also get away from text-based terminals."

"We want to offer our customers the best of both worlds. Linux/UNIX and Windows each have advantages. Many companies feel better about Linux or UNIX performance. But Windows offers better user interface options. So having the ability to run on a Linux or UNIX platform and yet offer a graphical Windows interface is a powerful solution that Acucorp makes possible with its Thin Client technology."

From pioneering business application "warning lights" to providing e-business support, SouthWare prides itself on helping customers such as Alliance Rubber Company, Atlanta Supply Company, and Bermuda Air Conditioning Ltd. achieve excellence. With a continued focus on superior service as well as innovative technologies, SouthWare's mature accounting solutions are well positioned to continue serving the business community for many years to come.

For more information about Acucorp, Inc., and our products, please visit www.acucorp.com

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