



GEO-SLOPE Rebuilds Web site with ASP.NET

Overview

Country: Canada

Industry: Civil Engineering

Customer Profile

GEO-SLOPE develops, markets and supports geotechnical software to help civil engineers model soil behaviour.

Established in 1977, GEO-SLOPE is based in Calgary but supports customers around the world

Business Situation

To help reach the thousands of engineers who use its geotechnical modelling software worldwide and advise customers about product updates, GEO-SLOPE needed to rebuild its Web site

Solution

Microsoft ASP.NET and the Microsoft Visual Studio development system helped enable GEO-SLOPE to quickly rebuild its Web site and reduce costs

Benefits

- Reduced costs
- Increased staff efficiency
- Improved customer service

“Our familiarity with Microsoft tools made it easy to learn ASP.NET, so we decided to rebuild our whole site. We even designed an online store, something that was not in the original plan.”

Nate Hekman, senior software developer, GEO-SLOPE International

Established in 1977, GEO-SLOPE International Ltd. develops software that helps civil engineers model soil behaviour. Selling its solution in more than 100 countries, GEO-SLOPE relies heavily on its Web site to communicate with its customers. GEO-SLOPE hired a firm to rebuild its Web site, but found the new site difficult to manage and maintain. To correct the problem, GEO-SLOPE began searching for a tool its internal team could use to build and maintain a new site. After looking at competitive solutions, GEO-SLOPE chose to redevelop its Web site with Microsoft® Visual Studio® development system and ASP.NET 2.0. The simple functionality and advanced capabilities of the solution enabled the GEO-SLOPE team to create a more intuitive, feature-rich site that is also easier to maintain. Microsoft technology has enabled GEO-SLOPE to reduce costs and improve efficiency and customer service.

Situation

GEO-SLOPE develops, markets and supports geotechnical software to help civil engineers model soil behaviour. Established in 1977, GEO-SLOPE has expanded throughout the world and now operates in more than 100 countries. To reach the thousands of engineers who use its geotechnical modelling software worldwide, GEO-SLOPE relies on its Web site to advise customers about product updates and provide software support.

Last year, GEO-SLOPE hired a Web design firm to help the company build a new site. Unfortunately, the firm went bankrupt halfway through the development, leaving GEO-SLOPE with a partially completed Web site that was difficult to operate. GEO-SLOPE went live with the site, but had difficulty managing it. "We were forced to learn the Content Management System halfway through. We had to go through a very strict process to do any updates and we had very little control," says Paul Grunau, general manager, GEO-SLOPE. To learn the system adequately, GEO-SLOPE's staff would have required significant training.

The Content Management System (CMS) solution sapped precious employee resources, requiring a full day of IT support to develop simple online forms. "Our biggest limitation was getting at the lower-level code. If we wanted to create a form, or make a change, then it became much more difficult," says Nate Hekman, senior software developer, GEO-SLOPE. "We were trying to learn the CMS tool as we went along, but it was too time-consuming for the team."

Since GEO-SLOPE had a very small IT staff, the company needed a content management solution that would allow for more control by the people making the changes. "It just seemed easier to write our own solution from scratch, and make it specific to our needs," says Hekman.

In order to improve Web site management, GEO-SLOPE decided to rebuild the site with more efficient development tools. GEO-SLOPE wanted a tool that would allow it to easily update the layout and structure of the site, not just change page content. After considering Macromedia Contribute and other competitive solutions, GEO-SLOPE chose to redesign the site with Microsoft® ASP.NET and the Visual Studio® development system.

Solution

GEO-SLOPE was looking for a way to enable customers to generate quotes and place orders on the site, and ASP.NET provided the functionality it needed to do that. Also, by taking advantage of Web services, GEO-SLOPE could allow customers to download new license files and service packs as they became available. "ASP.NET allowed us to develop our core Web site quickly with minimal code, and the added features let us deliver a more powerful site than we had anticipated," says Grunau.

As a Microsoft Certified Partner, GEO-SLOPE was familiar with ASP.NET and Visual Studio, and knew that it provided intuitive development and management capabilities. Although ASP.NET 2.0 was still in beta, the company had heard strong reviews and felt confident using the product. "Our familiarity with Microsoft development tools made it easy to learn, so we decided to rebuild our whole site with it," says Hekman. "We even designed an online store to incorporate into the site, something that was not in the original plan."

GEO-SLOPE had made a list of some of the features it wanted in a development system but assumed those features would require an extra investment. When GEO-SLOPE began working with ASP.NET, the company found

many of the modules it needed were already built in.

To help it store product and customer data, GEO-SLOPE chose Microsoft SQL Server™ Express and Microsoft Access, the database management system.

Benefits

Taking advantage of ASP.NET and Visual Studio helped GEO-SLOPE to rebuild its Web site in-house and save on the cost of training its employees. ASP.NET has also helped GEO-SLOPE with quick updates to the site, helping to increase staff efficiency and improve customer service. GEO-SLOPE anticipates an increase in sales due to its new online store component. Now, GEO-SLOPE has the technological capability of the online store and can build upon it in the future to offer other kinds of online products (e.g., registration for training workshops).

Reduced Costs

By using ASP.NET, GEO-SLOPE cut two months from its Web site development schedule. Bringing its development in-house using ASP.NET also allowed GEO-SLOPE to save the cost of training its staff on the old CMS tool. This resulted in direct cost savings of about \$5,000 in training and about \$10,000 in consulting fees.

“There is a lot of time wasted by outsourcing. There has to be constant communication between the firm and us and there is a lot of waiting for changes to be made,” says Hekman. “ASP.NET allowed us to keep the job in-house, and when it’s in-house we can respond more quickly to our customer needs.”

Increased Staff Efficiency

Using ASP.NET, GEO-SLOPE is able to save numerous staff hours by dedicating its resources to business-focused projects. “With the new system, it is much easier and faster

to make changes to the site compared to the CMS tool we used previously,” says Hekman. “It used to take me almost a day to create a complicated page using CMS, but with ASP.NET I can pull it together in half an hour.”

Also, changes to the site can be tested on a developer machine, where the results appear as if they were live. When the developer team is satisfied with the results, the changes can be quickly and easily deployed. GEO-SLOPE can now make changes without having to run the whole site live every time.

GEO-SLOPE had also been looking for a master template to help build its site, and was impressed by the Master Pages feature in ASP.NET 2.0, which was one of the reasons it chose to take advantage of the tool. “The Master Pages feature was a huge time saver for us. I can design the whole site and go back and make changes without having to make the change on every page,” says Hekman.

Improved Customer Service

Besides enabling the development of an online store, ASP.NET has helped GEO-SLOPE to take advantage of Web services to improve product management and customer service. GEO-SLOPE issues the digital rights to its software licenses by embedding a plain text file into the software and attaching it to a particular piece of hardware. GEO-SLOPE updates these license files every year, which caused significant administration both internally and for the customer. GEO-SLOPE is now taking advantage of its new site to help its customers receive their license files more easily.

“We just post a new file on the site and it appears in the software they are running. Customers can simply click to download it, and they are off and running for another year,” says Grunau. “This will increase customer satisfaction, without a doubt.”

For More Information

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For more information about GEO-SLOPE International Ltd., call (403) 269-2002 or visit the Web site at: www.geo-slope.com

In addition, GEO-SLOPE can now make available, via Web services, its knowledge base of technical support articles. Customers can add their own comments to the articles, allowing everyone to benefit from their experience.

Microsoft Visual Studio .NET

The Microsoft .NET Framework is an integral Windows(r) component for building and running the next generation of applications and XML Web services.

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