



IBM Business Partner Instantiations Inc. Improves Developer Productivity

VA Assist Enterprise/J is a must for major financial services company

In the competitive world of banking and finance, the pace of Web development can make the difference in achieving a winning edge. Using IBM VisualAge® for Java™, Des Moines-based Principal Financial Group® is able to take advantage of IBM's cutting-edge technologies, open standards and ability to quickly incorporate those technologies into usable products – enabling the Principal Financial Group to rapidly build crucial business applications.

At the same time, the Web development team at The Principal® knows that success depends on ensuring that 200-plus Java developers are getting the most out of IBM's sophisticated integrated development environment (IDE). It is not surprising that the team took notice when one of its developers discovered VA Assist Enterprise/J from Instantiations Inc. (www.instantiations.com), an IBM Business Partner and participant in the IBM Software Investment Initiative. Since November 2000, The Principal has purchased more than 100 licenses of the VisualAge productivity-enhancing tool.

"The most significant advantage that VA Assist has provided us is the ability to maintain a repetitive, automatic build and deployment process during off-hours, thus alleviating tying up a developer's machine during peak development time," Mark Herbsleb, senior technical analyst, the Principal Financial Group, says. "Before we had VA Assist, this process had to be done by hand. It can be error prone, takes a significant amount of time for our larger projects, and ties up the development environment -- preventing other work from being done."

The Productivity Predicament

The Principal Financial Group (www.principal.com) is a leader in offering businesses, individuals and institutional clients a wide range of financial products and services, including retirement and investment services, life and health insurance and mortgage banking through its diverse family of financial services companies. According to CFO Magazine, more employers choose the Principal Financial Group for their 401(k) plans than any other bank, mutual fund or insurance company in the United States. Its flagship and largest member, Principal Life Insurance Company (The Principal), was founded in 1879. A member of the Fortune 500, the Principal Financial Group has \$116.9 billion in assets under management as of June 30, 2001, and it serves some 13 million customers worldwide from offices in Asia, Australia, Europe, Latin America and the United States.

Java developers at The Principal are responsible for creating the online, self-service Web applications that enable those millions of customers to check on their mortgage payments, update their 401(k) or mutual fund accounts, apply for insurance or bank online. They also develop a number of internal self-service applications for The Principal employees. Meeting the demand for highly functional Web applications requires creating the most productive development environment possible.

"We wanted the tool to increase the productivity of our developers who use VisualAge for Java," Herbsleb says. "VA Assist enhances our VisualAge experience by automating many lengthy nightly processes, easing team development and adding numerous user interface enhancements for coding, analysis and reporting on our Java projects. We think it will quickly pay for itself."

The Productivity Solution

VA Assist Enterprise/J is a set of tools that integrates seamlessly into the standard VisualAge for Java workbench, browsers, wizards, repository explorer and composition editor. All VA Assist toolbars, buttons, menu items and functionality work intuitively with existing VisualAge for Java windows. VA Assist adds more than 250 productivity features and commands, including such functionality as

- Eclipse/WSAD Integration
- Browser/Ergonomic Enhancements
- Search Enhancements
- Source Code Enhancements
- Import/Export Enhancements
- Task Automation Enhancements
- Repository Explorer Enhancements
- VCE Enhancements
- Configurable Options Page

“VA Assist streamlines and enhances the development effort, enabling developers to deliver robust and flexible Web applications faster, while reducing development costs,” says Mark Johnson, vice president, Marketing and Business Development, Instantiations. “It’s the aggregation of all 250-plus features that makes it uniquely valuable to developers.”

VA Assist is the Java version of the VA Assist Enterprise product family from Instantiations, which specializes in helping enterprise customers build and deploy high-performance software systems using WebSphere application development tools. Located near Portland, Ore., Instantiations was founded by a team of pioneers in object-oriented software technology.

At Solutions, the IBM Technical Developer Conference in August 2001, Instantiations was named winner of an IBM Solution Excellence Award in the “Cool Tool” category for VA Assist Enterprise/J. Each year IBM recognizes eight members of its PartnerWorld for Developers program with the Solution Excellence Award. The Cool Tool award recognizes tools that help developers build e-business solutions faster and more easily.

As a participant in the IBM Software Investment Initiative, which supports targeted independent software vendors (ISVs) who integrate or influence sales of IBM middleware, Instantiations qualifies for co-marketing assistance through its commitment to influencing the sale of IBM software. The program helps Instantiations develop marketing plans, identify key markets and execute demand generation programs.

“Our advanced-level business partner relationship with IBM allows us access to IBM software technology, product groups, marketing programs and user groups,” Johnson says. “Our relationship with IBM has also allowed us to reach geographic markets we would have otherwise not been able to reach.”

Productivity Benefits

The Principal Financial Group relies on IBM VisualAge for Java because it provides “unparalleled legacy connectivity, a robust team development environment and a wealth of supporting knowledge bases like VisualAge Developer Domain, newsgroups and Redbooks,” Herbsleb says. “In our computing environment I would estimate a 50 percent return over other Java IDEs.”

Adding VA Assist to VisualAge, he says, improves developer satisfaction and decreases the company’s development cycle times. He estimates that the company is seeing an increase in productivity of up to 20 percent since it began using VA Assist.

“If you are developing using VisualAge, it’s a no-brainer that VA Assist is a must-have for your developers. Besides having an already full-featured, productivity-enhancing product that

developers should not be without, Instantiations continues to be phenomenally responsive to their customers' needs by adding the functionality that developers need to boost performance and enhance the experience of using VisualAge for Java," Herbsleb says.

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