

With Help from NetBeans, Teaming Up to Curb Drunk Driving

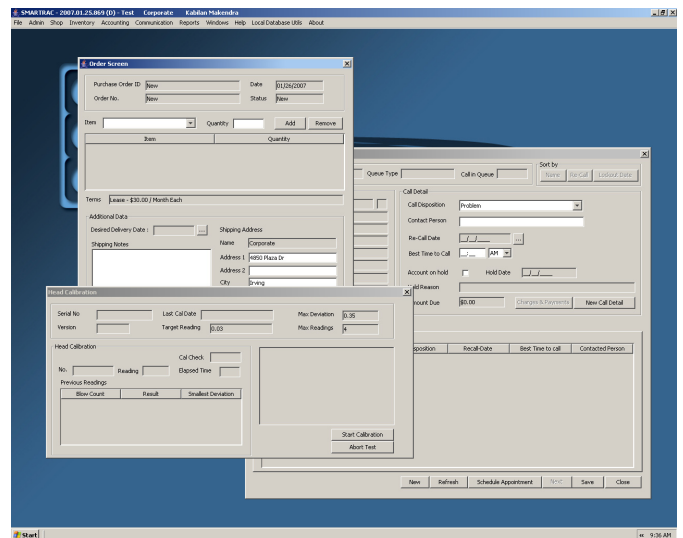
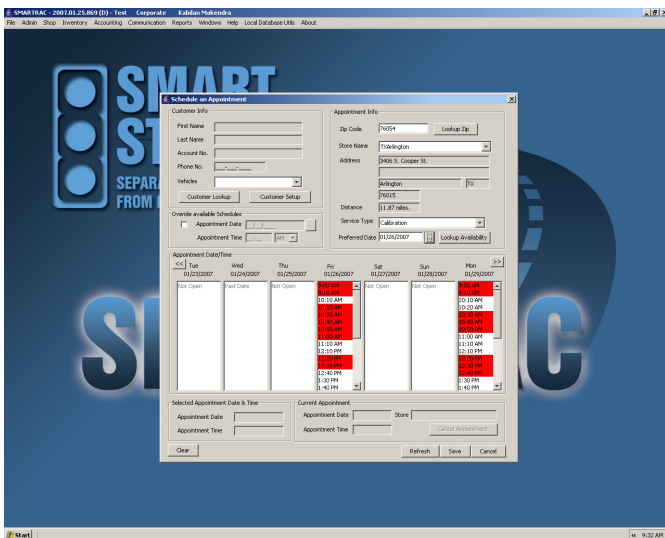
By their count, the developers at C. Pitman Baker & Associates handle a roster of 10 software development projects at any given time, of which six or seven are Java-based and built solely using the NetBeans platform. It would not be a stretch to call them enthusiastic fans of the NetBeans IDE.

“NetBeans is the only environment we use,” Chief Operating Officer Chris Gamble said in a recent interview. “NetBeans runs the gamut on flexibility and complicity, which is why we continue to use it for every project in Java. It gives us everything we need to get projects done regardless of the skill level of the developer. It’s a great system.”

Based in Irving, Texas, CPBinc is a software consulting and design firm that provides e-commerce solutions, enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems and custom software development to small and mid-sized companies in a range of industries: Telecom, Banking, Oil & Gas, Manufacturing, and more. The company and its team of developers have been NetBeans users since version 3.6.

“We’ve occasionally looked at other IDEs—Eclipse and Jbuilder—to see where things stand, but what we keep coming back to is that the NetBeans tool set is extremely mature and very stable.”

Gamble’s opinion of the NetBeans IDE was echoed by lead developer Kabilan Makendra and Mark Hughey, head of Sales & Marketing, when all three gathered to discuss the experience of using NetBeans 5.0 to build an integrated business application system called SMARTRAC for a client.



The client, Smart Start, a leading provider of ignition interlock systems, works with judicial agencies around the United States to monitor the driving habits of convicted drunk drivers. The interlock system is an in-car alcohol breath screening device that disables the vehicle if the driver is intoxicated. When Smart Start teamed up with CPBinc, it wanted a single operating system that would streamline all aspects of its business: from tracking the manufacture, sale, installation and repair of the interlock devices, to collecting data from installed devices and creating reports for the court systems. They also wanted a web interface that would give judges and probation officers access to the reports. The main objective, according to CPBinc, was to enable Smart Start to concentrate on the task of “separating drinking from driving”.

Lead developer Makendra and his team credits the NetBeans Profiler tool for helping with a particular challenge during the Smart Start project: the company's low-power computers.

"When we rolled out the project they still had machines running on 64MB of memory," the developer said. "We had to create a system that could operate under those constraints. Profiler showed where we were taking more memory and time and we knew where to make improvements."

Makendra also gave high marks to the IDE's refactoring tool, calling it a timesaver for moments when adjustments need to be made mid-way through projects.

Smart Start has been running the new ERP system across its 400 service centers since August 2006, and has seen improvements in its operations. In a written statement about the new system, the company president, Jim Ballard said: "SMARTRAC has given us much more process control at our service facilities and ultimately will help us provide better service to our customers and the courts."

CPBinc recently ported over from NetBeans 3.6 to NetBeans 5.5 and with minimal difficulty or retraining needed for its developers. Citing positive feedback from clients, the company plans to continue using the NetBeans IDE for future projects.

"For one client, using NetBeans we built a system that runs their entire company," Gamble said. "After, the owner told us his company could lose everything, but the system we built would still be functioning. It's always good to hear things like that about your work."