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Case Study: DRV Technologies' SpoolFlex

DRV Technologies' SpoolFlex helps Eljer deliver spooled information to users quickly, easily, and in a more practical and convenient format.

by Joel Klebanoff

Businesses are inundated with reports, but turning that data and information into knowledge and value can be difficult. Managers and analysts want the ability to perform value-enhancing activities—such as sorting, searching, and performing "what ifs"—against the data quickly and easily.

These tasks are best performed with spreadsheets, not reports. The challenge for Eljer, Inc. was to find a way to transfer data in existing spooled reports into Excel spreadsheets, where it can provide the greatest value for the company. Eljer now meets that challenge with SpoolFlex from DRV Technologies, Inc.

Founded in 1904, Dallas, Texas-based Eljer, Inc. is a leading manufacturer of residential and commercial plumbing products, with sales of approximately \$150 million. Its products include toilets, bathtubs, sinks, lavatories, whirlpools, bidets, shower bases, and commercial restroom fixtures. Previously owned by Jacuzzi Brands, Eljer is now a private company owned by an affiliate of Sun Capital Partners.

Eljer uses System i servers for most of its IT requirements. Its ERP software includes many useful reports, but the company needed to give users a way to work with the data in those reports in order to increase its value. Eljer considered a PC-based package that would fulfill the requirement, but the cost was too high. A separate license would have been required for each user who needed the functionality. What's more, those users would have required training in the new software. Eljer wanted to avoid those training costs by allowing users to employ a tool they were already familiar with, Excel.



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In Search of an Easier Way

As at all but the smallest of companies, audits are a fact of life at Eljer. In addition to regular internal financial audits, it must also occasionally submit to bank, municipality, and other tax audits, not to mention the SOX audit that was necessary until it became a private company. Most of the data that auditors need is available in the ERP-generated reports, but auditors don't want printed data or even electronic copies of reports. They insist on receiving data in spreadsheet form. Eljer wanted a way to meet this requirement without having to write customized programs to extract and convert the necessary data.

Mike Gleason, director of IT at Eljer, kept his eye out for a solution. One day, an ad for SpoolFlex arrived in the mail. Gleason checked it out and found that SpoolFlex would easily meet his needs at an affordable cost. SpoolFlex V3 allows complete reports or selected pages to be converted to any e-format, including Excel (XLS), Acrobat (PDF), plain text (TXT), rich text format (RTF), comma-separated values (CSV), HTML, and XML. The resulting files can be emailed, printed, faxed, or placed directly on a System i server.

Some products that claim to generate spreadsheet files offer only CSV format for that purpose. If the file is set up properly, Excel can perform the conversion, but the process is not foolproof and typically requires manual formatting and close examination for conversion errors. SpoolFlex's support for native Excel format (XLS) automates the conversion and makes the results available for immediate use without errors.

Eljer appreciates the fact that SpoolFlex is resident on System i. "In a small IT shop like ours, it's paramount to be on the 400. If the data is on one box, I want all of the tools on the same box." That reduces the number of skills required and eliminates the need for cross-platform interfaces.

Gleason found SpoolFlex easy to install. "DRV support was phenomenal. When I had a question, I connected with the support guy through a Web meeting and he answered it quickly. That saved us a ton of time."

SpoolFlex is also simple to learn. "There are a lot of wizards that make it very easy," explained Gleason. "DRV just walked me through it once, and I was able to use it after that."

Saving Time Across the Board

To provide users with Excel files from spooled data, Gleason creates a SpoolFlex definition. Within the first few days of installing the software, he had four or five definitions up and running. The company now has about 15 definitions. When users want an Excel file, they go to SpoolFlex and select what they want from a drop-down menu of available spool files. Then SpoolFlex emails it to them. Using the same process, creating Excel files for auditors is equally easy.

Eljer has received substantial tangible benefits from SpoolFlex. For example, one person in the credit department used to key data from a weekly report into a spreadsheet—a task that took about eight hours. Now it takes him about three minutes to get the spreadsheet directly from SpoolFlex.

SpoolFlex has also allowed Eljer to eliminate considerable tedious programming. "The reports we have are good; they just weren't in the format our users wanted," said Gleason. "With SpoolFlex, if we already have a spool file, we don't have to spend any money rewriting the reporting programs to create the spreadsheets."

SpoolFlex provided Eljer with a benefit that Gleason wasn't expecting. He originally installed it solely to create Excel files, but then he learned that it could also produce PDF output. Eljer runs five e-commerce sites. It now uses SpoolFlex to present customers with purchase orders and invoices in PDF format through the Web. This has increased the value that customers receive from the e-commerce sites.

The Bottom Line

The bottom line for Eljer is improved productivity for users and the IT department, more valuable data, and enhanced customer satisfaction. "In all my years of IT, moving data out of the 400 and into Excel or Access, where users can make better use of it, was the last piece of the puzzle," concluded Gleason. "SpoolFlex makes that migration fast, easy, and affordable."

About DRV Technologies, Inc.:

DRV Technologies, Inc. is an IBM Business Partner providing software solutions for the IBM i, iSeries, and AS/400. DRV Technologies' solutions are installed around the globe in a variety of vertical markets such as banking, manufacturing, healthcare, retail, distribution and other financial service industries. DRV Technologies is headquartered in Duluth, Georgia, with direct sales throughout North America.

For more information, please visit www.drvtech.com, call 678 417-1521 or email info@drvtech.com.