

San Diego casino bets on PHP: hits big payoff with improved access to staff payroll data



"When Barona asked me to 'web-face' some of their green screen applications to make them more user friendly for their staff, I knew PHP was the way to go. It makes applications appear and behave similar to other Internet programs that people are used to seeing. Simply 'web-facing' a green screen program is a temporary solution to a permanent problem."

Jeff Olen
Olen Consulting

Customer:	Barona Valley Ranch Resort & Casino
Geography:	North America
Industry:	Gaming, Resort Hotel, Golf
Challenge:	Providing a user-friendly browser-based interface to back-end RPG payroll and vacation applications
Application:	Web-based access to individual employee records to print payroll, address and vacation information
Solution:	Zend Core for i5/OS, Zend Studio for i5/OS

Owned and operated by the Barona Band of Mission Indians, Barona Valley Ranch Resort & Casino is located in Lakeside, CA, about 30 miles outside of San Diego, and employs 3,200 people. Intent on raising the bar on gaming in California, the centerpiece of the resort is a casino featuring 2,000 slot machines, video poker and keno machines, 70 exciting table games, a poker room and off-track betting. As a destination resort, Barona also offer fine dining, luxurious hotel accommodations, spa treatments, as well as golf at the award-winning Barona Creek Golf Club.

CHALLENGE

Barona's existing green screen payroll programs were neither easily accessible nor intuitive for the majority of service-based employees. Initially, Barona's management team was in search of a consultant to help them in "web-facing" the resort's existing payroll programs to allow staff members to monitor their earnings and vacation accrual information. The primary objectives were to offer employees direct access and the flexibility to track this information online, as well as reduce costly postage, printing and other mailing costs associated with payroll stubs for direct deposit.

Barona was put in touch with Jeff Olen of Olen Business Consulting, Inc., by a consultant who recognized Olen's affinity for working with PHP to convert iSeries applications to work with an Internet browser.

"Barona wanted to make a user-friendly application for its staff to be able to print their payroll check stubs instead of mailing them out every month," said Olen. "It not only had to be easy to use, it had to be secure."

Continued Olen, "Web-facing results in an interface that looks like a green screen with buttons on it that has been dropped into a web browser. But, I knew there was a better option available to help Barona achieve its goals – PHP."



The PHP Company

Olen also saw the potential to use the technology for Barona's other existing iSeries applications. "I suggested that if they wanted a 'quick and dirty' solution, then web-facing could do what they wanted. However, if they wanted to pursue web-based applications on a larger scale, then PHP was a much better overall solution." Olen explained that using PHP meant they could create an interface that would look like other Internet applications, and would give them more flexibility.

Known in the casino industry as a leader in developing and implementing the latest technologies, Barona's management team immediately saw the value and benefits of the PHP system.

SOLUTION

Jeff created an easy-to-use application using PHP that is both straightforward and simple. The user swipes his/her employee badge (or keys in their employee number) and then uses an HTML keypad to key in their PIN number. They are then presented with several options for viewing and printing payroll, address and vacation information. The original plan was for the printing to be done via an iSeries spool file. But eventually they decided on creating a "print-friendly" link, just using JavaScript to print the page. The application also has built-in security features: it will automatically log the user off the system, returning to the login screen after two minutes of inactivity. The beauty of the application is that it behaves like other Internet-based web applications that employees are already familiar with, so they don't have to learn anything new. "The real benefit of the wireless barcode system is that we can now track inventory in real-time," says FSIP CFO Joe Spangler. "Purchasing agents can stay on top of the order process automatically, enabling us to better satisfy our customer's lead time requirements. We're no longer running out of stock on parts."

BENEFITS

Cost savings in printing, labor and postage costs: The application will save Barona an estimated \$50,000 annually in postage, printing and assorted other mailing costs associated with the paycheck stubs for direct deposit.

Increased convenience for employees: Now, employees can check their PTO accruals at anytime and view future accruals to see when they will have enough time to take a well-deserved vacation.

Ability to build in automatic security: With such sensitive information being displayed, it was imperative to build in an auto logoff feature, something that could not be done with a "web-facing" conversion of the RPG program.

Flexible printing using JavaScript: By using JavaScript to print the actual check stubs the client was able to avoid maintaining a list of all the kiosks and creating separate spool queues for each one. This in turn saved development dollars.

Gives a new lease on life to iSeries programs: The project has given a rather dramatic example of how iSeries applications can be "modernized" to improve its accessibility and functionality with relatively little effort.

Opened the door to future PHP-based applications: Once the client saw how easy it was to create a highly useful and successful application, they quickly saw the potential for using PHP to create other web-based programs to improve operations and cut costs.



Executive Director of IT for Barona Valley Ranch Resort & Casino, Mike Murphy notes, "We are very happy with the application Jeff built for us using PHP. It provided much-needed functionality that our existing system didn't offer. Since we plan on upgrading our financial system in the near future, it turned out to be just the bridge we needed as we go through our evaluations of different options for the iSeries. The beauty of the PHP application is that whether we upgrade or replace our existing financials, we can use this application going forward through any transition."

IMPLEMENTATION

Says Olen, "I knew PHP was the way to go. It makes applications appear and behave like the other Internet programs that people are used to seeing. Simply 'web-facing' a green screen program is a temporary solution to a permanent problem." It took Jeff, who has been programming on IBM systems for years, about 100 hours to achieve just the solution the client had in mind. Quick time to market benefited both parties.

NEXT STEPS

Barona Valley Ranch Resort & Casino is planning to implement a PHP-based Player's Club application that will provide additional benefits and rewards for its most valuable customers. The company is always looking for ways to enhance the gaming experience for its guests, and plans to leverage the Web to forge closer relationships and build unique loyalty programs.

SOLUTION PROVIDER

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