



Sports-Video Software Firm Seeks New Wins with Solution on Windows-Based Slates

Overview

Country or Region: United States
Industry: Professional services—IT services

Customer Profile

LRS Sports was created in 1996 as a group within Levi, Ray & Shoup, a Springfield, Illinois-based solution provider. LRS Sports employs 14 people.

Business Situation

Customers began showing more and more interest in slate tablet PCs, but LRS Sports Edge, the firm's flagship product, was not optimized for that environment.

Solution

With the release of slates that run the Windows 7 operating system, LRS Sports put plans in place for developing a release of LRS Sports Edge optimized for them.

Benefits

- Stylus-based telestration
- Direct playback of DV-AVI video
- Versatile computing environment
- Competitive advantage and enhanced reputation

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Dan McCain, Senior Manager, LRS Sports

LRS Sports is a well-known provider of innovative video-editing and video-analysis solutions for athletics. Seeking to boost its competitive advantage, the company will optimize its flagship product for use on a Windows-based slate—a specific type of tablet PC that also runs the Windows 7 operating system. With this move, the company will offer customers the familiarity of a solution they already use on desktop and portable computer platforms with the convenience of the slate form factor. The company also will offer capabilities that are unavailable on non-Windows-based slates, including stylus-based telestration, direct playback of DV-AVI video, USB connectivity, and full support for Microsoft Office and other productivity solutions. In turn, LRS Sports expects to strengthen customer loyalty, reach new customers, and enhance its reputation as an innovator.

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Situation

LRS Sports, part of Springfield, Illinois-based solution provider Levi, Ray & Shoup, got its start through a software-consulting engagement with a local football organization and rapidly became a prominent player in its market. That market consists of head coaches and their staff, video coordinators, and others who rely on sophisticated video-editing and video-analysis solutions to gain the advantage over competitors in high-school, collegiate, and professional athletics. LRS Sports Edge, the company's flagship product, is an essential page in the playbooks of more than 20 football organizations; a similar product, LRS Sports Team Scout, targets customers in basketball, soccer, ice hockey, volleyball, and other athletic endeavors. In all, LRS Sports products are in use by more than 120 athletic teams and related organizations.

The core LRS Sports Edge application runs on a local network and, through a companion product, Edge Online, offers anywhere, anytime access through a cloud-services infrastructure. However it is accessed, LRS Sports Edge provides comprehensive integration of tasks and tools—data capture, entry, and markup; video output; playbook drawing; data handling; filtering; and more. LRS Sports Edge also simplifies the creation and handling of cutups, those segments of video in which a crucial play is captured, and telestration, which helps coaches pinpoint what makes a play successful or not.

As a member of the Microsoft Partner Network with Gold competencies, LRS Sports created LRS Sports Edge using Microsoft development technologies and designed it to run in the Windows 7 operating-system environment. The solution runs on desktop and portable PCs

as well as Windows-based slates—tablet PCs without an integrated physical keyboard and that run Windows—but the vast majority of installations have been on desktop and portable computer hardware because the solution was not optimized for the slate form factor.

With the increasing popularity of slates, LRS Sports executives faced a challenge. “More and more customers began to express interest in having a product that had the capabilities of LRS Sports Edge and that was fully optimized for the slate form factor,” says Dan McCain, Senior Manager at LRS Sports. “To continue our leadership in this market, we needed to address that interest, and soon.”

Solution

In mid-2011, McCain and LRS Sports developers set out to build a release of LRS Sports Edge that would be fully optimized for Windows-based slates. Developers launched the project by conferring with consultants from Microsoft to determine which capabilities in the current LRS Sports Edge release would transfer directly to slates without modification, which would transfer with modification, and which would need to be built from scratch.

“For example, we knew we would need to significantly revise those parts of the user experience that depend on right-mouse-click functionality,” explains Chris Allen, Solutions Consultant at LRS Sports. “We also knew we would want to assign some key functionality to the stylus input, a central part of the slate form factor and one that is critical in telestration applications.”

To create the new release, the developers are relying extensively on products and technologies in the Microsoft .NET Framework 4 environment, just as they did

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for creating the current release of LRS Sports Edge. These products and technologies include:

- Microsoft Visual Studio Team Foundation Server 2010, for managing source code and builds.
- Windows Presentation Foundation 4, for supporting the solution’s highly graphical and interactive user experience.
- Windows Communication Foundation 4, for communications between LRS Sports Edge and the media processor used by Edge Online for supporting Rich Internet Application (RIA) services.
- Microsoft Expression Blend 4, for sophisticated graphics design and styling.
- Microsoft Silverlight 4, for browser access to Edge Online.

The developers anticipate having a beta release of LRS Sports Edge optimized for Windows-based slates by August 2011, the start of the collegiate football season, and a production release of the software available by January 2012.

Benefits

By providing LRS Sports Edge in a release optimized for Windows-based slates, LRS Sports will bring customers productivity capabilities that are available on all PCs that run Windows 7, capabilities that are not available on slates that run other operating systems. These capabilities include stylus-based telestration, direct playback of DV-AVI video, support for USB connectivity, and support for Microsoft Office—all of which are essential for helping coaches and their colleagues make the most of the time and effort they put into video editing and analysis. As a result, LRS Sports anticipates enhancing its loyalty among existing customers and potentially reaching new customers as well.

Unrivaled Capabilities

Allen acknowledges that many coaches who asked him and his colleagues about a release of LRS Sports Edge that is optimized for slates currently use iPads and other non-Windows-based slates. He emphasizes, however, that the solution on Windows-based slates will feature capabilities that are not available on other slates.

“Take stylus-based telestration, for example, which emulates the ‘coach at a chalkboard’ scenario better than anything else,” Allen says. “With a stylus, a coach can apply more or less pressure to draw a thicker or thinner line, or even use the opposite end of the stylus as an eraser—exactly like a pencil. You cannot do that on an iPad.”

Support for Essential Peripherals

For LRS Sports, another advantage of Windows-based slates is their ability to import DV-AVI video format, the format most commonly used in athletics, and play it back without having to transcode it into MP4 format—a capability supported by Windows 7 but not by the operating systems that run on other slates. “Even though the MP4 format is making inroads, hundreds of high-school and collegiate athletic departments maintain large investments in video cameras that produce DV-AVI,” Allen explains. “Having LRS Sports Edge on a slate that instantly plays back the video format that coaches use most will be a big advantage.”

Support for USB connectivity is yet another advantage of Windows-based slates over other slates. “When coaches are not on the team bus or the practice field, they’ll use LRS Sports Edge on a slate in the same way they now use the desktop and laptop versions of the software—connected to large-screen displays, high-end laser-

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pointing devices, and ‘commando remote’ devices, for enhanced display and control,” Allen says. “With solutions on other slates, connectivity to these essential peripherals isn’t easy, or sometimes even possible. With LRS Sports on Windows-based slates, it will be, and that’s a major plus.”

Versatile Computing Tools

For coaches, perhaps the most powerful aspect of having LRS Sports Edge optimized for Windows-based slates is the convenience of having a “one-stop shop” for all their computing needs. “As much as coaches depend on LRS Sports Edge for helping them do their jobs, they also depend on email, word- and spreadsheet-processing software, and an array of other applications that they run in the Windows 7 environment,” Allen notes. “Whatever work they do on their desktop or laptop, they can do on their Windows-based slate, too, connected to an external display and keyboard for work in the office, or simply on its own for work in the field, on the road, from home, wherever.”

And that is the kind of convenience that appeals to a broad range of potential customers. “Not just coaches, but trainers, players, and recruiters will be able to watch video as it’s being recorded on the field, access it on their own Windows-based slate—and then turn around and answer an urgent email, schedule a meeting, or do anything else they might need to do at that time,” McCain points out. “Having a solution out there that is this convenient and this powerful will potentially broaden our customer base, which in turn will broaden the set of innovations we can consider for future releases. With LRS Sports Edge optimized for Windows-based slates, our opportunities are wide open.”

For More Information

For more information about Microsoft products and services, call the Microsoft Sales Information Center at (800) 426-9400. In Canada, call the Microsoft Canada Information Centre at (877) 568-2495. Customers in the United States and Canada who are deaf or hard-of-hearing can reach Microsoft text telephone (TTY/TDD) services at (800) 892-5234. Outside the 50 United States and Canada, please contact your local Microsoft subsidiary. To access information using the World Wide Web, go to:

www.microsoft.com

For more information about LRS Sports products and services, call (888) 577-0001 or visit the website at:

www.lrs.com/LRSSports

Windows 7

Works the way you want: Windows 7 will help your organization use information technology to gain a competitive advantage in today's new world of work. Your people will be able to be more productive anywhere. You will be able to support your mobile workforce with better access to shared data and collaboration tools. And your IT staff will have better tools and technologies for enhanced corporate IT security and data protection, and more efficient deployment and management.

For more information about Windows 7, go to:

www.microsoft.com/windows/windows-7

Software and Services

- Windows 7
- Technologies
 - Microsoft Expression Blend 4
 - Microsoft .NET Framework 4
 - Microsoft Silverlight 4
 - Windows Communication Foundation 4
 - Windows Presentation Foundation 4

- Microsoft Visual Studio
 - Microsoft Visual Studio Team Foundation Server 2010

Hardware

- Slate tablet PCs