NorthWestern Energy Uses GuiXT to Simplify SAP Process—Cuts Training Time in Half, Reenergizes Workforce

"With GuiXT it was easier to navigate between transactions and to correct mistakes...users keep asking for MORE, and can we do this or that with GuiXT."

—Donnell Kuchtyn, NorthWestern Energy

Synactive's GuiXT technology enables NorthWestern Energy to cut cost and boost productivity, in addition to creating much more intuitive screen transactions. For instance, the time to create a notification transaction and embed the create customer transaction decreased from seven and a half minutes to four; from 21 screens to just four; and from 50 input fields to 42. NorthWestern achieved similar results during the entire notification through order completion process.

About NorthWestern Energy

With its corporate headquarters in Sioux Falls, South Dakota and its IT operations located primarily in Butte, Montana, NorthWestern Energy (NWE) provides electricity and natural gas in the Upper Midwest and Northwest, serving approximately 661,000 customers in Montana, South Dakota, and Nebraska.

NorthWestern's business consists of federal- and state-regulated electric and natural gas distribution and transmission and electric generation operations. During a turbulent 2009, NWE produced a total shareholder return of 17.6 percent, exceeding the peer average and the broad utility indices. NWE continues to act on initiatives to improve and grow in and around their service territories that are intended to provide sustainable value to stakeholders and price stability to customers.

Challenge

Challenges were nothing new at NorthWestern Energy. For example, many SAP users at NWE faced daily challenges trying to navigate between transactions, too many fields and tabs, and trying to decipher field descriptions. Training was also very time consuming, and frustration was mounting because many of their legacy controls and edits were lost with upgrades. On top of all that there was no consistency across service areas for the same processes. At the end of the day, all anyone at NorthWestern wanted was for SAP to be more intuitive.

As a result of all the user input, NWE began to look for a solution that would improve the end user experience. This led to a few key questions that had to be answered in order to proceed. Did a solution even exist that could address all of NWE's challenges with SAP? Was it flexible? Was it fast to develop and easy to customize? Was it affordable?

Industry: Public Utility
Business: Electricity and Gas—Transmission and Distribution

HIGHLIGHTS

Challenge
- SAP transactions not intuitive
- Navigation between transactions is difficult
- Too many fields and tabs

SAP Architecture/Environment
Version 4.6C (When GuiXT implemented); Currently version 5.0

SAP Modules Customized
Plant Maintenance • Service Management • Sales & Distribution

List of Notifications: IW51, IW52, IW53, IW56, IW57
Customer Records: XD01, XD02, XD03
Customer Quotations: VA21, VA22, VA23
Service Orders: IW31, IW32, IW33
Edited Orders: IW72, IW73
Sales Orders: VA01, VA02, VA03
Billing Document: VF01, VF02, VF03

Solution
- GuiXT combined transactions from three fields to only one
- GuiXT allows fields to be auto-populated
- GuiXT enables SAP fields to be renamed for easier understanding
- GuiXT allows function codes to be embedded to handle errors
- GuiXT means SAP training time is cut in half

GuiXT Components Implemented
Designer • Server • Input Assistant • Mobile

Benefits
- Easy to navigate and intuitive SAP processes
- Better control over performance metrics
- Reduced training of new employees by 50 percent

Return on Investment
GuiXT implementation greatly simplified SAP screens resulting in significant reduction in support calls.

Solution

The GuiXT solution implemented by NorthWestern Energy included GuiXT Designer, Studio, Server, and Input Assistant. NWE also purchased GuiXT Mobile to be deployed at a later date. GuiXT is currently being used by nearly 400 employees, with the total number of SAP users hovering around 1400. To simplify and customize SAP processes throughout the entire organization, NWE used Designer, Input Assistant and Studio to generate portable GuiXT scripts, combining SAP screens, tabs, and transactions in a matter of minutes. In addition to launch pads and buttons being created, specific fields could be auto populated and renamed.

GuiXT Server was used to provide a centralized mechanism for deployment and maintenance of GuiXT scripts, as well as to send updates—invisible to the user. Although very easy to customize and fast to deploy, if more complex processes such as creating custom transactions and function modules are planned, then a person with ABAP experience who knows how to script will be helpful.

Benefits

Collectively, SAP users at NWE were very frustrated. But that was before GuiXT was implemented. After SAP was GuiXT'd processes were immediately more intuitive and easier to navigate between transactions. As a result, users wanted more and kept asking, "can we do this or that with GuiXT?" And the answer was yes, yes you can!

GuiXT forced consistent processes across the organization's service areas (Montana, South Dakota and Nebraska) with auditable processes for business control. Users now only see the field and tabs they need to see, while consistently applied data is defaulted. Launch pads and buttons were created eliminating the need to know obscure SAP transaction codes. Before GuiXT, training took two days, now it only takes one. And another huge benefit, when an SAP upgrade occurs the screen changes are invisible to the users—no additional training costs, no loss in time, no confusion.

Initial implementation of GuiXT literally took just one week using Synactive's on-site consultation. This proved to be a great knowledge transfer and speedy roll-out. The expertise and troubleshooting knowledge of the consultants went well beyond anything NWE expected. And with a dedicated server deployment, maintenance was very easy and straightforward. When added all up, it was money well spent!

BEFORE
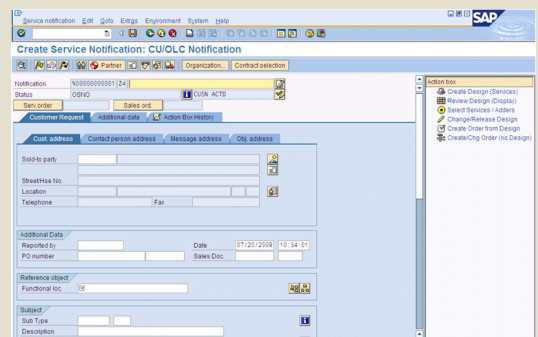
Z4 Notification without GuiXT, has extra icons, tabs and fields.
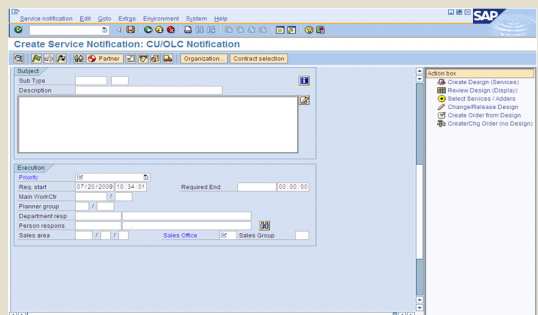
Z4 Notification without GuiXT includes a second page.

As you can see, before GuiXT, NorthWestern Energy's SAP Create Service Notification transaction screens had extra icons and too many tabs and fields, which is evident from the scroll bar. Infact, end user complaints stated that navigation between transactions is beyond difficult.

AFTER
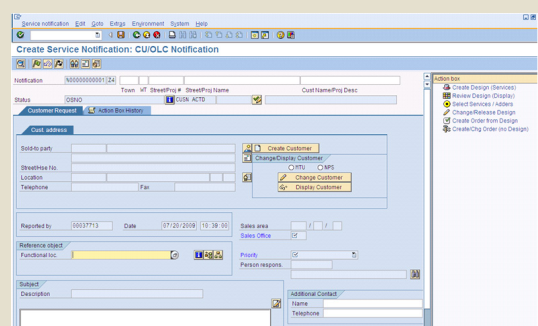
After GuiXT, Service Notification screens were reduced to only one; NWE added additional GuiXT push buttons, fields and field descriptions that were much more intuitive. Customized transaction push buttons include: Create Customer; Change Customer; and Display Customer. Subsequently, end users wanted more screens and transactions to be GuiXT'd.