ROTO-ROOTER PLUMBERS

PowerTerm® Pro helps Roto Rooter Speed Dispatch Process Without Draining Resources

The Challenge

To provide dispatchers in its company-owned branches with simpler access to inquiry screens and applications, and speed the dispatching process, Roto-Rooter wanted to transition its "green screen" shop to Windows – without interrupting regular business operations by attempting to rebuild hundreds of legacy applications at once.

Results

Ericom's PowerTerm Pro provided Roto-Rooter with a powerful, affordable solution to handle the migration using a phased approach – providing transparent access to new and legacy applications throughout the transition, without causing downtime to the entire system.

Benefits

PowerTerm Pro eliminated the costly need to rewrite legacy applications upfront, enabling Roto-Rooter to manage the transition in phases – delivering immediate results, without slowing daily operations.

PowerTerm Pro's powerful scripting language and other features allowed Roto-Rooter to quickly automate key business functions without complex programming, further simplifying and streamlining the dispatching process.

PowerTerm Pro linked legacy systems with Windows applications to preserve existing functionality and flow, making all programs and features seamlessly available to dispatchers and managers.

PowerTerm Pro offered a customizable, point-and-click interface for Roto-Rooter to create an integrated look and feel, offering transparent access to dispatchers seeking information on back-end systems.
Following the initial success, Roto-Rooter plans to extend its use of PowerTerm Pro to support similar projects at its other company-owned call center branches and departments around the country.
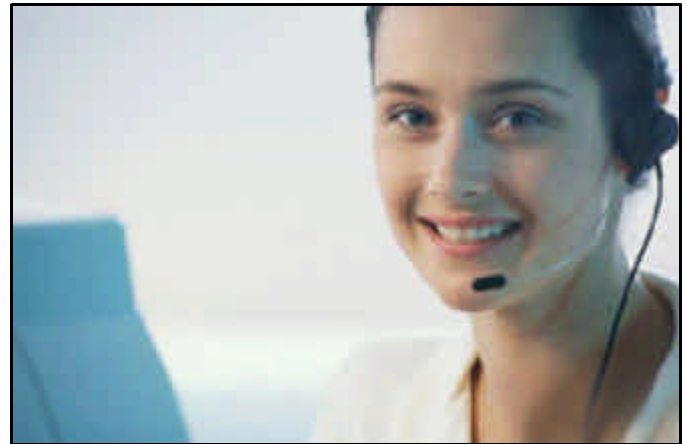
Customer
Roto-Rooter, Inc., plumbing & drain service

Solution
PowerTerm Pro

Host Server
IBM AS/400 on Frame Relay via TCP/IP

Users
Dispatchers at Roto-Rooter's company-owned Cincinnati and Memphis branches, as well as its Chicago call center.

"PowerTerm Pro was a lifesaver for us. As we continue to tie legacy applications to new applications, we depend more and more on the PowerTerm solution to make it happen, while minimizing the time, costs and risks involved."

Tom Duebber,
Programmer/Analyst,
Roto-Rooter

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About Roto-Rooter

Roto-Rooter is the largest provider of plumbing and drain cleaning services in North America, operating businesses in more than 100 company-owned territories and more than 500 franchise territories. The company serves approximately 90% of the U.S. population and 55% of the Canadian population. Master franchise operations have been established in Japan, Philippines, Australia, United Kingdom, Hong Kong/China and Indonesia/Singapore.

Roto-Rooter dispatchers are required to access multiple inquiry screens and applications residing on the company's AS/400, so dispatchers can send drivers out on service calls in a timely and efficient manner. Though the company had started to transition many of its screens to Windows-based programs, many of the programs are still in green-screen format. To ensure seamless access to all information during the transition process, Roto-Rooter needed its dispatchers of its company-owned branches to have access to the existing green-screen applications from within the Windows applications, without having to get out of the Windows application to do so. Ericom's PowerTerm Pro software was installed at Roto-Rooter's company-owned branches to make this possible.

From Green-Screen to User-Friendly GUI

Roto-Rooter's applications reside on IBM AS/400 hosts. Strictly an AS/400 "green screen" shop, the company recently decided to upgrade its dispatch software programs to Windows, and provide a more graphical, intuitive approach to access data in order to streamline and speed the dispatching process. The company ultimately plans to move completely to a Windows-Client server environment. To start the process, Roto-Rooter chose AVR (ASNA Visual RPG), a Windows-based language program, and began the major project of rewriting its programs one at a time. Roto-Rooter used the AS/400 as a server, and created a series of Windows-based programs to access and present its user data in a more useful format. The goal was to tie the AS/400 green-screen applications not yet rewritten with the ASNA. According to Tom Duebber, Roto-Rooter Programmer/Analyst, this was a daunting task.

"The process of rewriting or rebuilding hundreds of legacy applications at once was not feasible. It would be too time-consuming and require too much system downtime, which we simply could not afford," explained Duebber. "We needed to find a way to rewrite applications a little at a time, so we could begin the migration process without interrupting our regular business operations."

In March 2001, at an ASNA convention in Texas, Duebber approached the ASNA consultants with this challenge. They recommended **Ericom Software's PowerTerm Pro** host access solution. PowerTerm Pro offers a Windows-based terminal emulation software that provides seamless access to mission-critical legacy applications, supporting a wide range of systems including IBM, Digital, wyse, Data General, SCO, HP and Tandem. After reviewing PowerTerm Pro alongside a range of competing products, Roto-Rooter selected the Ericom solution. Unlike other products, PowerTerm Pro offered the key features that Roto-Rooter was looking for, at a reasonable price.

"PowerTerm Pro was the best solution for our needs. Some products we looked at were too expensive, and exceeded our IT budget; others did not have the functionality we needed," commented Duebber. "In some cases, we encountered vendors who were simply not responsive to our needs. We realized that if we weren't getting a response from them before buying the product, we couldn't be sure that we'd get the right support from them as a customer."

PowerTerm Pro provided Roto-Rooter with a powerful, yet affordable solution to effectively link its new Windows applications with its AS/400 applications that have not yet been rewritten, and maintain regular business operations. With PowerTerm Pro, the company created a phased approach to transitioning its legacy applications to Windows-based programs – minimizing the time, costs and risks involved with such a project.

PowerTerm Pro Delivers

Roto-Rooter deployed PowerTerm Pro as a middleware platform between the AVR and the AS/400 applications on the AS/400 server. Duebber downloaded a 30-day evaluation version, but it took only four days to set up the PowerTerm Pro system, and tie in the organization's new Windows programs with the inquiry programs still on green screens. Today, PowerTerm Pro is used by 10 dispatchers at Roto-Rooter's branches in Cincinnati, OH
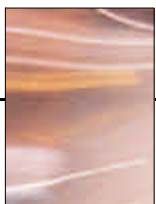
company's Chicago call center, which handles hundreds of calls for the Chicago area. Dispatchers access IBM AS/400 applications running over a frame relay TCP/IP network.

A key feature for Roto-Rooter in getting PowerTerm Pro up and running was the software's powerful scripting language. Within a few days, Duebber was able to easily write scripts to program a command that calls up the AS400 menu to bring up the CL program for logging into a particular AS400 program. The entire process of logging into the AS/400 application via PowerTerm Pro is made seamlessly, and is transparent to the user.

With PowerTerm Pro in place, dispatchers receive calls from customers and open up various inquiry screens, including job information, driver availability and customer details, to name a few. For more information about a particular job, the dispatcher clicks on the 'Inquiry' button, which triggers PowerTerm Pro to open a window and show the dispatcher the original AS/400 inquiry screen - even if it has not yet been rewritten in AVR language.

PowerTerm Pro presents the accessed green screens in a GUI that fits in with the AVR for a more integrated look and feel, enabling dispatchers to work more easily and efficiently. The Windows screen is linked with the AS/400 screen, providing a similar front-end GUI, making it a transparent transition for the dispatcher accessing the information.

Using the PowerTerm Pro scripting language, Roto-Rooter turned complex Function Key instructions into simple command buttons, so dispatchers can access what they need with a click of the mouse. The PowerTerm Pro window appears just like a "Windows" screen, and is transparent to the dispatcher, who doesn't even realize that PowerTerm Pro is displaying the Inquiry Window.

Using PowerTerm Pro, Roto-Rooter has been able to convert its green screen programs to Windows in stages, rather than having to rewrite all the programs at once. Applications that have not yet been converted are linked to those that have been, so existing functionality and flow remains intact. As a result, Roto-Rooter can effectively its transition legacy applications, without affecting daily operations. All programs and functionality are still seamlessly available to the company's dispatchers and managers.

"We took several applications and rewrote them in the AVR language to start. Some programs were tied to function keys, and programmed to jump back from the green screen to the Windows application," explained Duebber. "With PowerTerm Pro, our users can simply click on a button in a Windows application to bring up a program in the green screen format."

This feature also makes it easy for PowerTerm Pro users to pass parameters between applications. For instance, Roto-Rooter dispatchers can use PowerTerm Pro to access the display screen from their ticket inquiry system, and display it in a user-friendly GUI – enabling both technical and non-technical users to quickly access and use the information they need, without worrying about deciphering complex code or other data.

According to Duebber, PowerTerm also enabled Roto-Rooter to turn function keys – which were a critical part of their green screen applications – into buttons, enabling users to access a range of functionality with a single click. For instance, dispatchers can press a button to automatically close PowerTerm Pro when required, and immediately return to the Windows-based application.

Moving Ahead with PowerTerm Pro

Following the initial success of PowerTerm Pro, Roto-Rooter plans to extend the current installation to other branches and call centers around the country. The company's Florida call center will be the next to implement the PowerTerm Pro solution. Additionally, as departments such as Customer Service and Branch Management plan to move to Windows applications, Roto-Rooter will continue to leverage PowerTerm Pro to make the transition seamless.

Earlier this year, Duebber returned to the same ASNA convention he had attended the previous year. "This time, other companies were asking the same questions we asked last time: 'how do we access our legacy applications and use them with new applications?' This time, I had the answers: I told them how PowerTerm Pro was a lifesaver for us. With each release of legacy applications with new applications, we are depending more and more on the implementation of the PowerTerm solution."