

D-Tools Inc. Uses Microsoft Technologies to Integrate Data and Streamline Processes for A/V Systems Integrators

Microsoft Partner Solution Study

August 2001

A/V systems integrators worldwide struggle with inefficient processes, disparate data and project documents, inaccurate project bids, and uncertain profit margins. D-Tools Inc. created System Integrator Si to provide a cost-effective end to this struggle. System Integrator Si uses the Microsoft® Visio® platform to integrate the disparate data, reports, documents, and drawings used throughout an A/V project into a single data source and project file thereby increasing data accuracy, reducing costly errors, and streamlining the entire process. You can bid, manage, design, document, and estimate costs for your commercial and residential A/V projects, all with a single tool.

Partner Profile

Adam Stone, D-Tools founder and president, saw the need to simplify the complicated design, documentation, and estimation process involved in large-scale commercial and residential projects. In August 1997, he founded D-Tools, and with VB consultant John Lacher, began creating software based on the Microsoft Visio platform that would meet this need, thus pioneering a new market in A/V system integration software.

D-Tools Inc. is now a Microsoft Certified Partner and a leader in A/V system integration software providing software and Visio consulting services to more than 700 organizations in more than 10 countries worldwide. Their current software product—System Integrator Si—uses the versatile Microsoft Visio platform and Microsoft database technologies to integrate data with shapes and create a single data source for A/V systems integrators. It also exports project data and drawings to several other Microsoft file formats and uses Microsoft Smart Tags to link the exported project data to project drawings. Add to that their new Web-based DataXchange service that uses Microsoft SQL Server™ to maintain a library of up-to-date project information containing more than 30,000 SKUs and you have a complete solution for A/V system integrators.

Business Challenge

The complicated, error-prone process that A/V systems integrators struggle with on a daily basis and the process Adam Stone sought to simplify involves data compiled from disparate and potentially unreliable sources and documents created in numerous software products. For example, your sales staff might compile price information from printed price lists and catalogs in an Excel file. Your management staff might schedule resources and order equipment from a different list in Microsoft Word. And, your engineers might create AutoCAD drawings from yet another set of data. Change orders, transcription errors and out-of-date lists further increase the odds of introducing errors into the process. D-Tools needed versatile, easily extendable technology that would enable them develop software that integrated the data and documents used throughout this type of typical A/V project and streamlined the process.

D-Tools Overview

Contact Information

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D-Tools Profile

D-Tools Inc., a leader in A/V system design and Microsoft Certified Partner, provides software and Visio consulting services to over 700 organizations in over 10 countries worldwide.

Target Audience

A/V systems integrators implementing high-end commercial and residential A/V electronic systems

D-Tools Software and Services

- System Integrator Si
- QuickLinks
- DataXchange

Microsoft Technologies

- Microsoft® Visio®
- Microsoft Office
- Microsoft Project
- Microsoft Visual Basic® for Applications (VBA)
- Microsoft SQL Server™

Customer Satisfaction

"I feel the D-Tools software is the single most effective tool I have seen for custom installation. It not only provides a tremendous time-saving tool, but it raises the level of professionalism. We are glad to be a part of their effort and the solutions it brings to Monster Cable customers."

--Noel Lee
The Head Monster
Monster Cable

Microsoft®

Microsoft Technologies Used

The following list discusses the Microsoft technologies used to develop key System Integrator Si features and support D-Tools services:

- **Microsoft Visio technology** When asked why he used Microsoft Visio technology to create System Integrator Si, Adam Stone says, "The thing that I like best about Visio technology is its consistent user interface and ease of use. For years I had struggled with traditional CAD programs with their steep learning curves and proprietary interfaces. Visio successfully bridges the gap between low end, limited functionality drawing packages and high end, complicated CAD packages. Anyone familiar with the Microsoft Office interface can be instantly productive with Visio yet there is enough horsepower and programmability under the hood to tackle the largest projects."

Microsoft Visio SmartShapes technology enabled D-Tools to integrate and centralize all the data for an A/V project. And, the shapes and the familiar Microsoft user interface make it easy for you to assemble accurate A/V project drawings in a fraction of the time it would take to draw them. Your sales staff can create parts lists with the DataMatrix window, and then quickly create preliminary drawings for presentations and bid proposals to add a touch of professionalism. Your engineer can create complete documentation, including floor plans, elevation drawings, and functional wire schematics for your system installers. Then, anyone on your team can use these drawings to visualize the project and create reports.

- **Microsoft Office integration and Smart Tags** At any time in the process, you can also use your data to create a contract in Microsoft Word, price and parts list with exact equipment dimensions in Microsoft Excel, project management file in Microsoft Project, or slide presentation in Microsoft PowerPoint® that includes all your project drawings. You can create a broad range of client, installation, and management reports and design, management, and cost of labor estimates with as much detail as you need. And, System Integrator Si uses Microsoft Smart Tags to link equipment in a parts list in an Excel file to the same piece of equipment in a project drawing.

Adam Stone says this about Microsoft product integration, "With minimum programming you can make Visio talk to an Access database, run a report from the Access table to Excel for further enhancement. Take that Excel file and paste it into a PowerPoint Presentation. I don't want to oversimplify it but using Microsoft technology is almost a "Lego" like approach where you grab the appropriate "block" and "snap" into place. Using any other technology would be like first building a factory to build the blocks, then building actual the actual blocks and then snapping them together to build the application."

- **Microsoft SQL Server** Manufacturers, dealers, and installers can gather, maintain, and distribute accurate, up-to-date product information using the D-Tools Web-based DataXchange service—free of charge to System Integrator Si customers. D-Tools uses Microsoft SQL Server to maintain a database of more than 30,000 SKUs, and as John Lacher says, "It's an industry standard, and with SQL Server, we have no concerns about growth."

Customer Satisfaction

"I think a program like this that helps A/V dealers spec and install a wide range of products will do a great service to our industry. Our members are already bogged down by the enormous of products, technologies, and standards in the A/V industry. The last thing they need is a design and proposal system based on various proprietary protocols. This Microsoft technology-based D-Tools will be a welcome relief to systems integrators."

--Debra Smith
Executive Director
PARA

"D-Tools does automatically what I used to spend hours on manually. What a godsend."

--Michael J. Braithwaite
Residential Products Manager
Creston

"Reporting is worth the cost of the software—drawings are a bonus. I don't know how we managed without D-Tools. It's brilliant. D-Tools rules. DataXchange rules."

--Jerry Richardson
Pro Home Systems

"D-Tools Si software coupled with DataXchange has enabled us to complete proposals and documentation packages that once took up to 20 hours to complete in just two hours and with a greater level of detail and accuracy."

--Jim Monson
Systems Engineer
Bel-Tek Integrated Systems

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