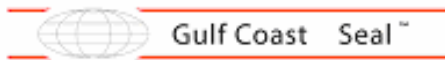




Case Study:
FarPoint Spread for BizTalk



Unlocking XLS Data: Automating the Handling of Excel XLS Documents in BizTalk Server 2006

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Introduction

“The ease of use, speed, and reliability of Spread for BizTalk has saved us a considerable amount of time and dollars. It has already paid for itself many times over!”

Jeff Lynch, E-Commerce Manager,
Gulf Coast Seal

Gulf Coast Seal (GCS) manufactures and distributes seals and gaskets for the oil and gas industry with annual revenues over 30 million dollars US. Besides distributing more than 50,000 off-the-shelf seal-related products each year, it also delivers over 4,000 customized product solutions to customers. That's a lot of business for a company with only 130 employees. With business at an all-time high, we handle hundreds of orders every day and communicate with vendors and our warehouse almost as many times, requesting and receiving information about parts inventory and inventory supplies. Our offices in Houston, Texas and Glasgow, Scotland keep in touch with customers worldwide. Our company has automated much of our order processing with Microsoft BizTalk Server 2006 and Commerce Server 2007, which includes allowing customers to place orders, check order status, and other aspects of account management online.

We often receive inventory documents in the form of Excel spreadsheets attached to emails. While we have automated much of our business process, with Microsoft BizTalk Server 2006, we face an uphill battle with incoming data in Excel XLS file attachments that must be manually converted to text files prior to being submitted to our automated process. Welcome to our world! And if you think you are the only one who has to face the manual conversion of Excel data into an otherwise automated BizTalk orchestration, then listen to our story. You are not alone. We found a solution that is easy to configure and reliable in everyday use. Let us tell you how we shaved countless hours of manual data conversion and fully integrated incoming Excel XLS files into our BizTalk orchestrations using FarPoint Spread for BizTalk.

Background

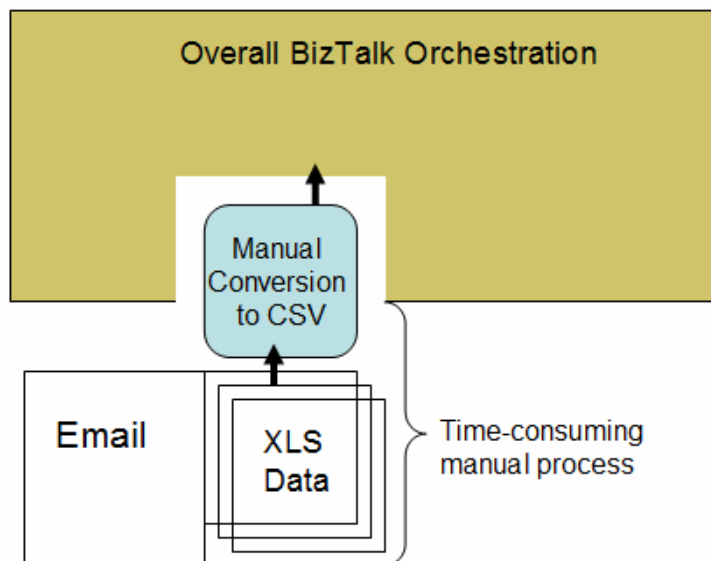
The power of Microsoft BizTalk server 2006 cannot be underestimated when you are automating a business process that involves large amounts of data on a frequent basis. At Gulf Coast Seal, we handle big and small orders for any number of products. Our challenge was to remove the bottleneck from order entry and better focus on product delivery, all while maintaining correct inventory data. We have written elsewhere about how Microsoft BizTalk Server

2006 has provided a solution to most of our problems in automating our process. (See the Case Study by Gulf Coast Seal and Microsoft entitled "**Seal Maker Expects \$5 Million Revenue Boost from Internet Ordering System**", available online at [www.microsoft.com/biztalk/evaluation/casestudies/.](http://www.microsoft.com/biztalk/evaluation/casestudies/)) Now we are facing a particular challenge with the entry of a particular kind of data.

Real Challenge

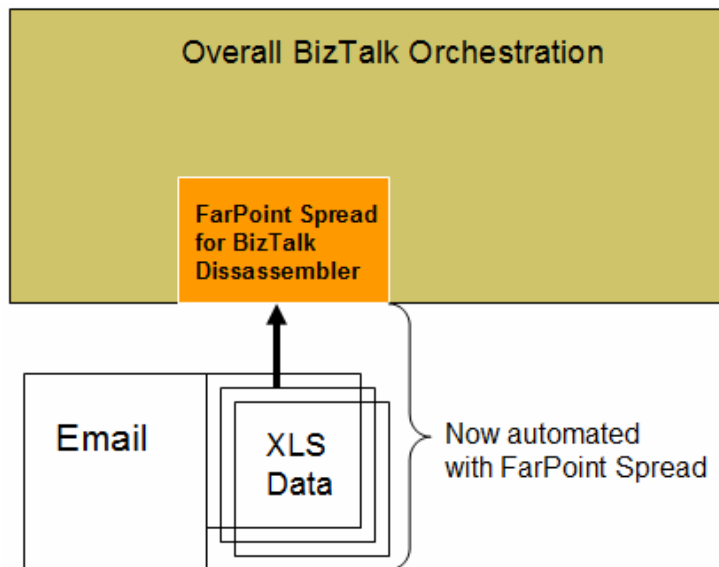
We have customers and suppliers who regularly send us product and inventory documents via email as Excel (XLS) file attachments. You might think that by sending data in such an electronic form would be straightforward and simple to deal with. Unfortunately, though the overall process of inventory management is automated, and the data in XLS files is outside the overall process.

The only practical way for us to get these documents into our BizTalk orchestration is for an employee to open each Excel XLS file we receive and save it as a CSV file so it can enter the BizTalk orchestration through the Microsoft Flat File Disassembler. But as the number of such emails and attached documents grows, this becomes the bottleneck in the process. This is beginning to occupy the employee on a full-time basis with such manual conversions. It goes against the whole idea of an automated business process. We need to find a solution.



Focused Solution

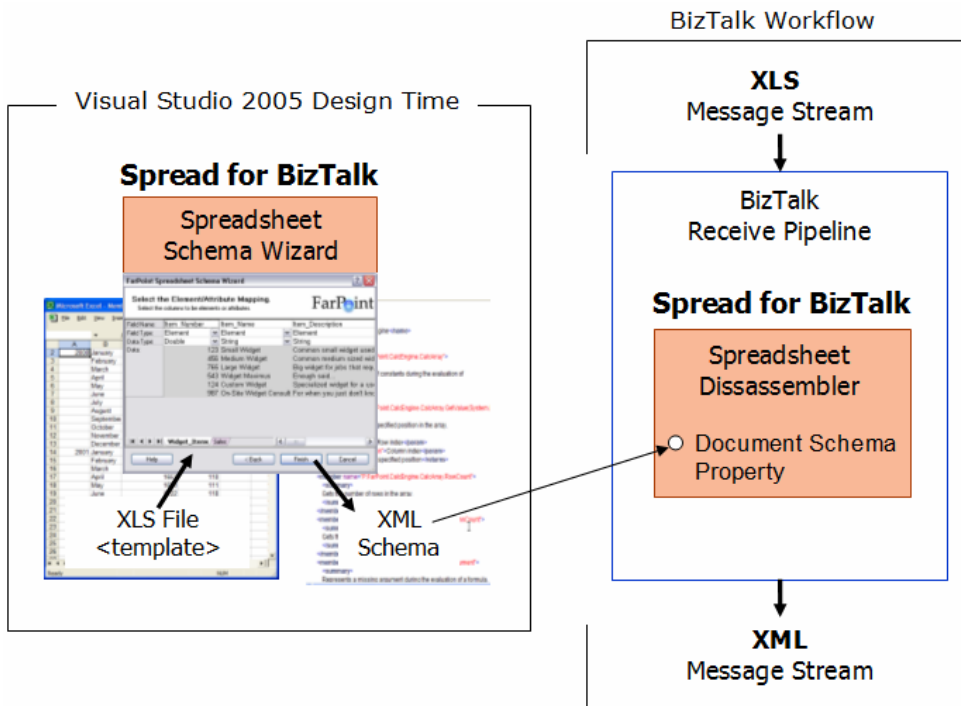
We recently provided FarPoint Technologies with a description of our problem, along with design suggestions. FarPoint took that input and developed a BizTalk pipeline component to answer this need. In contacts with FarPoint we talked directly with talented support people who helped us understand the capabilities of their spreadsheet disassembler. By using Spread for BizTalk we can now completely automate this process.



FarPoint Spread for BizTalk has two parts that contribute to the power and usability of the product: the Spreadsheet Schema Wizard and the Spreadsheet Disassembler.

The Visual Studio 2005-integrated Spreadsheet Schema Wizard provides us with a codeless way to create XML schemas by clicking through a series of dialogs.

Our solution uses a BizTalk POP3 adapter that listens for emails containing XLS file attachments. When an Excel XLS attachment is received, it is put on a BizTalk Receive Pipeline as an XLS stream. Spread for BizTalk takes the XLS stream and parses it into XML that matches the schema we created using the Spread for BizTalk Schema Wizard at design time. From that point, the XML data stream flows to the next step in the automated process.



So the pipeline, at runtime, receives XLS messages, parses the data, and uses the schema to map the resulting XML. The process is smooth, simple and efficient.

Adding the FarPoint Spread for BizTalk disassembler to our overall BizTalk solution was as easy as dragging and dropping.

Benefits

"We chose FarPoint Spread because it offered a complete solution to what we saw as an essential piece of the e-commerce puzzle."

Jeff Lynch
E-Commerce Manager
Gulf Coast Seal

The ease of use, speed, and reliability of Spread for BizTalk has saved us a considerable amount of time and dollars. It has increased our productivity and improved the quality of our data processing. Spread for BizTalk already has paid for itself many times over and continues to become a better investment with each transaction!

- Provides a codeless solution to create custom schemas
- Automates the parsing of XLS message stream into XML message streams
- Preserves XLS data through disassembler for Sarbanes-Oxley compliance

More Information

“This is one of the single most important and long-awaited innovations to the business process integration (BPI) market I’ve ever seen!”

Jeff Lynch
E-Commerce Manager
Gulf Coast Seal

For more information about FarPoint Technologies and their FarPoint Spread for BizTalk solutions, visit them online at <http://www.FarPointSpread.com/biztalk> or call them at their North American office at 919-460-4551 (or email them at sales@FarPointSpread.com). You can reach them at their European office at +44 (0) 1798 812 372 (or email them at salesEurope@FarPointSpread.com).

FarPoint Technologies, Inc. is a leading provider of professional solutions for enterprise-wide development in Microsoft BizTalk and Microsoft Visual Studio .NET. FarPoint set the standard for spreadsheet components with the world’s best selling spreadsheet component, Spread, and continues to set high standards in component architecture, offering products across a range of platforms.

For more information about Gulf Coast Seal, Ltd. products and services, visit us online at www.gulfcoastseal.com or call us at (713) 910-7700.