EUROFIL first in France with online insurance services.

Overview

■ **Challenge**
Improve market position by providing full-service insurance online

■ **Solution**
Online self-service insurance policy application, premium payment and claims processing services, based on Enterprise JavaBeans™ architecture

■ **Why IBM?**
IBM's reputation in France and the technical merits of the IBM software

■ **Key Business Benefits**
200-300 days development time saved; 25% savings in development costs; first-mover advantage
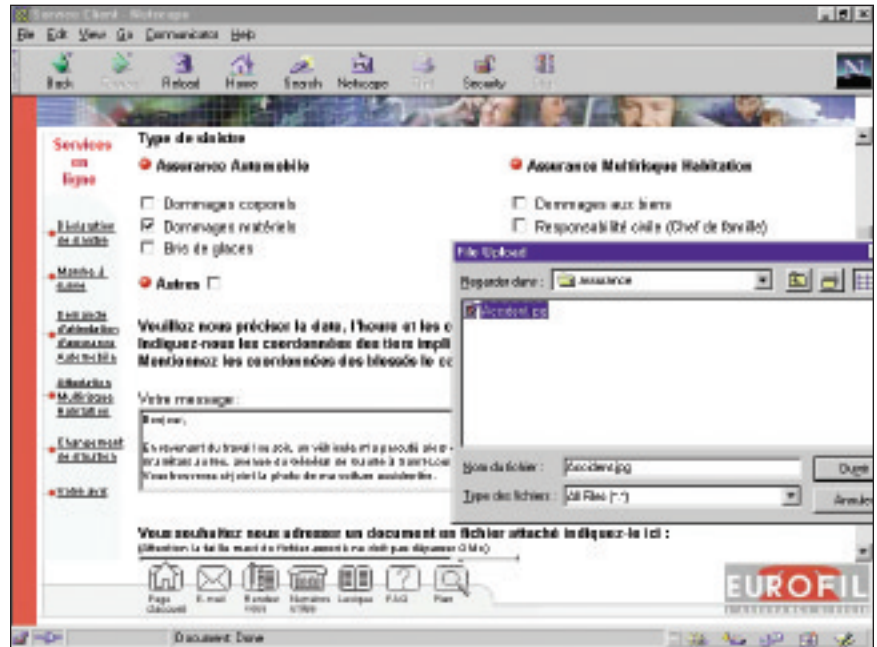
EUROFIL uses forms to help customers submit claims, upload photos or otherwise communicate with the company, without using a separate e-mail account. The JavaMail™ API, running in WebSphere® Application Server, routes the customer's communication to EUROFIL's e-mail system.

With annual revenues of FRF400 million ($57.7 million), EUROFIL is the second largest direct insurance company in France. Specializing in home and automobile coverage, the insurer, based in Rueil-Malmaison, near Paris, serves 150,000 policy-holders and processes 50,000 claims annually.

For ten years, EUROFIL had been acquiring and servicing customers by phone and through France's Minitel terminal system. Although the insurer expected the telephone to

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– Yvon Vornique, IT Manager, EUROFIL

e business®

remain an important sales and service channel, its call center staff had grown to nearly 300 customer service representatives — a cost factor EUROFIL needed to keep in check. And the text-based Minitel system, although a revenue generator for EUROFIL, could provide only quotes — it could not support robust transactional functionality.

Anticipating that the Internet would become an important channel for the insurance industry, EUROFIL wanted to be first in the French insurance market with Internet service capabilities. "We wanted to extend our phone-based system to the Internet to sell new policies and enable customers to file claims and pay their premiums online," explains EUROFIL IT Manager Yvon Vornique.

At the same time, the company wanted to protect its investment in its legacy call center application. "The objective was to lay down a very solid foundation for e-business, but we did not want to develop new business logic for functionality the phone-based system already had," Vornique says.

Choosing WebSphere lowers risk for Java pioneers

When EUROFIL began planning to extend its phone channel to the Web in mid-1999, it looked to Java™ technology as an efficient means of developing and managing interactive Web site functionality. However, at the time Java was not widely adopted in France. To mitigate the risk of applying this relatively untested technology to its business-critical processes, EUROFIL considered only the leading e-business vendors in France: IBM and BEA Systems. Vornique recalls, "We were looking for a mature tool that we could use to implement Enterprise JavaBeans and other Java concepts. That narrowed the choice to IBM WebSphere Application Server and BEA WebLogic. And IBM had a significant advantage. In addition to its long-standing reputation for delivering solid IT solutions, IBM's WebSphere software enabled us to reuse the business logic in our legacy systems. For example, reusing our legacy quoting engine saved us between 200 and 300 days of development time — leading to a 25 percent cost savings."

DB2® Universal Database™ not only manages EUROFIL's policy and claim data, it also serves as the data store for the company's workflow application, which indexes incoming e-mails from the Web site and routes them to the appropriate EUROFIL employees.

"With the IBM e-business infrastructure we now have in place, it would take us only two months to set up Web services."

– Thibaut Regnier, e-business Project Leader, EUROFIL

With initial assistance from IBM Business Partner Valoris, EUROFIL created an e-business infrastructure powered by WebSphere Application Server, Advanced Edition and IBM DB2 Universal Database for iSeries. Developed in six months, the EUROFIL online customer service site runs on an IBM @server xSeries server and is integrated with EUROFIL's legacy applications residing on IBM @server iSeries machines. "One of the main technical advantages of WebSphere Application Server and DB2 is their scalability," Vornique says. "Initially, we chose to run the application on the Intel-based xSeries server, but as our volume of business grows, we plan to migrate it to the iSeries platform. The IBM software makes it easy to do that."

Insurance gets interactive and personal

To support the interactive services EUROFIL wanted to provide, Valoris used IBM VisualAge for Java to build a Web site architecture based on Enterprise JavaBeans™ (EJB™) business logic components. These reusable components (called beans) reside on the server, where they can be made available to this and any other application that EUROFIL may develop. WebSphere Application Server, Advanced Edition provides the runtime environment for the business logic, most of which includes calls to the legacy COBOL programs. EUROFIL used the IBM AS/400® Toolbox for Java, which is included in VisualAge for Java, Enterprise Edition, to generate these calls.

EUROFIL's COBOL programs—including its insurance quoting engine, as well as its claims processing and billing systems—run on an iSeries Model 730 system, along with DB2 Universal Database, which contains all the customer and policy information. A copy of this database resides on an iSeries Model S10 server protected by a firewall at EUROFIL's ISP, Matra Global Net Services, in the town of Velizy. "We store all our critical data in DB2 on the iSeries server," notes EUROFIL e-business Project Leader Thibaut Regnier. "This gives us the reliability we need and the security our customers expect for their personal and credit card information." WebSphere Application Server and IBM HTTP Server are also hosted at Matra on an xSeries server.

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According to Regnier, personalization was one of the most important attributes the Java technology afforded the application. When prospects or policyholders want to access the quoting engine or the other services on the EUROFIL Web site, he says, they are initially prompted for personal information or a user ID and password. A servlet accepts this information and passes it to a stateful session bean, which accesses the database to verify if the visitor is a client or a prospect and retains the user information throughout the visitor's online session. This eliminates the need for the Web application to repeatedly request user input before processing a request. JavaServer Pages™ (JSP™) —Java servlets dedicated to the presentation aspects of the application —also use the stored information to customize the Web page presentation to the type of user interacting with it. For example, prospective customers would not see a button enabling them to submit a claim.

Web services in the works
While Web-enabling its existing services was EUROFIL's primary objective for this e-business initiative, the company was also motivated by a desire to diversify its business and explore new partnerships—for example, with banks and online insurance quoting portals. These partnerships, which

EUROFIL expects to activate in the near future, are expected to enable EUROFIL to leverage its core skills to generate new revenue streams.

Through the insurance quoting portals, EUROFIL is looking to generate new customer leads. Based on the user's insurance needs, the portals would send quote requests in XML to various insurance companies, including EUROFIL. Using the IBM XML Parser, EUROFIL could translate these requests into a format appropriate for its legacy applications, and the quotes could be converted back into XML and sent to the portal. Such cross-company integration would enable the portals to provide very accurate quotes, while remaining vendor neutral, since they wouldn't need to send their visitors to the insurance companies' Web sites.

In the longer term, EUROFIL plans to make its foray into the emerging market for insurance Web services. "An automobile manufacturer or dealer, for example, could offer automobile insurance underwritten by EUROFIL through its Web site by deploying an application that accesses EUROFIL's insurance services components over the Internet," Regnier explains. "With the IBM e-business infrastructure we now have in place, it would take us only two months to set up Web services."

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