MJT Net Consultant Spotlight Podcast Series

Gary DalSanto, Inventive Software Designs

Interview by Tracy Fitzpatrick

FITZPATRICK: Hi. It's Tracy Fitzpatrick with MJT Net. Welcome to our consultant spotlight podcast series. In this series we are showcasing consultancies that are successfully using Macro Scheduler to solve problems not only for their customers, but also for MJT Net's clients. With me today is Gary DalSanto, the owner of Inventive Software Designs from Akron, Ohio. Gary, thank you for joining in today to share your story.

DALSANTO: Hi, Tracy. It's a pleasure to be here today.

FITZPATRICK: Great. Well I know Gary that you've been using Macro Scheduler since 2006, and prior to that had been working for many years with commercial automation tools. I know, before, you had mentioned Rational Robot. So this whole concept of automation is something you're very familiar with. And so, can you tell me, what drew you to a tool like Macro Scheduler since you had been using other commercial tools?

DALSANTO: Sure. Well, I had been using the Rational Robot automation tool for over 10 years on some pretty large scale projects, such as Y2K and data conversions for a large telecom company. And one day a fellow consultant that I worked with, who was also using Robot, introduced me to this product called Macro Scheduler. And he was using it to do some real simple data entry on a screen, and he needed to distribute the scripts throughout the whole organization, which was over 1,500 PCs, that it needed to be run on. So to do that, with a commercial tool like Robot, it costs $5,000 a PC, which made that just way too expensive.

So he showed me this tool, Macro Scheduler. He showed me the benefits it had. He showed me it had a VB Script interface, and it could also compile it as an executable for distribution to other PCs. Which initially I thought, "Wow, that's quite impressive because, you know, that's a real powerful marketing piece to that tool because you can just run it on all these PCs without all the licensing fees. So, however, me using Robot for over 10 years at this telecom company, I was a little skeptical.

FITZPATRICK: Sure. I mean anybody would be after you've been using something for so long, you're familiar with it and you have faith in it. So it takes something big for someone to switch over.

DALSANTO: Right. And I had a huge library of scripts for this telecom company over the 10 years, and everybody's comfort level was… like I say, with Robot since it was a commercial tool that was tested, was very positive. So, on the side I downloaded a demo of MJT Net's Macro Scheduler, the 30 day trial, played around with it, writing a

few scripts, and tried to find some holes in it - functionality versus the Robot tool. And I quickly found out that not only Macro Scheduler could perform all the functionality that we were using with the higher priced commercial tool, but it could also do it for a fraction of the cost. So from that point on, I was pretty much sold.

FITZPATRICK: OK. Yeah, well, that's kind of the proof is in the pudding, right?

DALSANTO: Yeah

FITZPATRICK: So, clearly you were able to save a lot of money there when you're talking about the number of PCs you would have been working with. So tell me what you're doing now.

DALSANTO: An example of a large project that I used was to, was in the telecom business, to process orders for a telecom company during a data conversion. So that was a huge project and it entailed basically taking all the pending service orders… when you do a conversion at a telecom company, what ends up happening is, that during the conversion period, you go down for like three to four days.

FITZPATRICK: Right. OK. When you're talking conversion, you're saying when they assume another company and they're pulling all that data into one system?

DALSANTO: Right. When a new property is purchased in a telecom business, the new customer base needs to be converted from the purchased telecom system to the existing company's telecom system. So when the conversion happens and there is usually that down time, where the converted customers are being moved into the new system, but for those three or four days, people are still calling in to add new business lines, change their address…

FITZPATRICK: So business still continues on the front end. It's just the back end that's got to be down, essentially, right?

DALSANTO: Exactly. But all these orders, you know, they have to keep track of them because when the systems come back up, they all have to manually be entered in.

FITZPATRICK: Wow. So three or four days – that's quite a few calls I would imagine. I know it doesn't matter what day of the week I call a telecom company, it seems like I'm on hold forever.

DALSANTO: Right. Well it's typical that these pending transaction orders, it depends on the size of the property being purchased. It could be in the thousands. So for the conversion process that I did, the telecom company had a down time application to capture all of these pending transactions into a SQL server database.

FITZPATRICK: OK. So they use a separate system.

DALSANTO: Right. Right. It was small scale. It wasn't, you know, a huge system that could handle all of the throughput but for the weekend it would capture the data that they needed. So, it would capture all the information needed to reenter these orders into the multiple backend system. So once the conversion is complete, and the system came back up, they would then process these pending orders from the data that was saved in this downtime system. So that's where I came in and created… I applied the Macro Scheduler scripting tool to create a data-driven script to process these multiple order types.

FITZPATRICK: Oh, so before, somebody was actually manually entering these thousands of entries ,essentially, into the main system?

DALSANTO: Exactly, so,

FITZPATRICK: Wow, that sounds like an error-filled process…

DALSANTO: Exactly. And this conversion ended up being 28,000 pending service orders because the property they purchased was over multiple states.

FITZPATRICK: Wow.

DALSANTO: One of the states was Texas. So you can imagine all these different pending orders. So, what I ended up doing was writing a – I wrote a data driven script that was written so I could run it on multiple PCs. So we had a few test labs that had a total of 50 machines that we used for this conversion process. So the test script would grab an order from the downtime database, read the order type, with the customer information, and then open up the appropriate application where the order types, you know, where the data entry was actually going to go into. It could be a web app, a mainframe app, a Windows app. And one of the apps I talked to directly was even a web service that performed customer bill payments.

FITZPATRICK: Oh, ok. So if somebody called in to pay their bill, the information was entered into this intermediate system, if you will, and then the Macro Scheduler script that you wrote would take that and plug it into the bill pay center.

DALSANTO: Right. Which actually talked directly to a web service.

FITZPATRICK: Wow.

DALSANTO: So the script running on 50 machines, would process each order logging information such as screen shots and other information, and then update the final pass/fail results of that order into a results database. So that when it was all said and done, they had this log information that gave them traceability on every single order that the automated tool entered into their system.

FITZPATRICK: Wow. OK. That's great. So I would think with that traceability they could go back if there were errors or something didn't go quite right they could kind of follow the trail back.

DALSANTO: What was really neat was on the 50 machines we ran this process on 50 machines simultaneously for 38 hours straight, and we processed 750 orders an hour.

FITZPATRICK: Wow.

DALSANTO: From all that, we entered these pending orders at a success rate of around 99% and we only had 400 orders of the 28,000 that fell out that needed to be entered manually. And from the logging and the screenshots, we had all the information that the call center needed to enter them in, and they ended up entering those in less than a day.

FITZPATRICK: Sure. Well, 400 is a far cry from 28,000.

DALSANTO: Right, right. And just to keep it all in perspective, doing it manually, if you took – if every order takes an average of around 10 minutes doing it manually, you have 28,000 orders, that would have taken a staff of 60 working for 77 hours almost 2 weeks straight, just to enter in these orders. So that's 60 employees not being able to do any of their regular work. They're doing just work from these 4 days where the systems were down. They are basically doing all this re-entry, with probably lots of errors.

FITZPATRICK: If you even have 60 employees. Right? With the way the economy the way it is, now and kind of always, you know we're in lean times, so if they even had 60 employees standing by to do data entry…

DALSANTO: Right. So looking at the time it took to do it manually versus them time it took to do it with the Macro Scheduler script, we basically put in 15 orders per hour, per machine for 50 machines. So roughly we did an order every 4 minutes on every machine and got it done in 38 hours.

FITZPATRICK: Wow. I would think that in addition to the obvious – time-savings and money – I would be curious to know what happens to those people who called in over that three or four days normally, without this process. How long does it take for their order to go in? And how does that clog the system even more?

DALSANTO: It would probably, they would probably get more than 60 employees, because all the utility companies, they are under laws by the public utility commission that if they don't get stuff done within a certain time frame, they get fined.

FITZPATRICK: Oh. Well, yeah!

DALSANTO: So, it's a rippling effect, so it's – it basically is very important that these orders get in as soon as possible. And with this automation, we were able to do it. Like,

we had everything, we started the entry of the orders on a Sunday night and we had them basically done by the end of the day Monday.

FITZPATRICK: Wow. Were they absolutely shocked?

DALSANTO: Uh, well, we did it multiple times with the Robot tool, but then we did it with this Macro Scheduler. And it worked as streamlined as, you know, basically I converted Robot scripts to the Macro Scheduler, and it's something they've come to expect – that's how they did their data conversion.

FITZPATRICK: OK, right. So it's not necessarily the value in the functionality – it had been there, but the fact that they saved so much money on 50 machines.

DALSANTO: Right, right. I would say the first time they saw it happen, they were really shocked.

FITZPATRICK: Blown away.

DALSANTO: Blown away.

FITZPATRICK: Well I hope you got a bonus that year – a good one.

DALSANTO: Well, I was a contractor, so I ended up working like 38 hours straight babysitting it, watching it go, and basically I was like a one man band. And basically I put my 40 hours in that week.

FITZPATRICK: Uh huh. Well, it's just, it's just so neat. It goes to show the power of automation.

DALSANTO: Right, right. I was running on adrenaline.

FITZPATRICK: Gary, thank you so much for your time and for sharing your story.

DALSANTO: It's been a pleasure, and, automation, like, when people say automation – we really can't apply it to this or that. I still haven't found that application where I can't apply it.

FITZPATRICK: Now for our audience, if you found this consultant spotlight podcast useful, you may like to listen to our other spotlight podcasts by visiting our website at www.mjtnet.com. If you would like to learn more about working with consultants like Gary, you can contact us directly by sending an email to help@mjtnet.com. Or if you'd like to contact Gary DalSanto directly, he can be reached via his website at www.InventiveSD.com.