

Actian Zen Empowers TAIFUN ERP



Challenge

TAIFUN Software needed a high-performance database with a small footprint that its ERP system users would not need to manage.

Solution

Actian Zen

Outcome

Actian Zen delivers the combination of high performance and low touch that TAIFUN wanted for its ERP system. Customers in the German and Austrian building trades have a powerful, integrated ERP system that they can use to run all their operations—without the aid of an IT team.

About TAIFUN Software AG

For more than 30 years, Hannover-based [TAIFUN Software AG](#) has been developing commercial software to meet the specialized needs of firms involved in the German and Austrian construction and specialty crafts trades. TAIFUN's portfolio includes a complete ERP solution with mobile extensions as well as solutions for document management, email archiving, and more.

Case Study

"TAIFUN's ERP system is extremely fast, which is great when you're using a small computer. A big part of that is due to the Actian Zen database. It's easy to install; it's predictable, reliable, and very responsive. The biggest thing for us was database stability. Our customers are not IT guys; they don't want to deal with database issues. We install it; they use it. They don't need to manage it. That's a big part of what our customers like about our software."

- Steffen Goldenstein, Head of Development, TAIFUN Software AG

Some people involved in the building trades—carpenters and bricklayers, for example—excel at building and maintaining structures. Others—such as plumbers, electricians, and HVAC installers—excel at building and maintaining infrastructures. One thing they seem to have in common is that few have any interest in building or maintaining a *database*—even when that database lies at the heart of an ERP system specifically designed to meet the needs of firms operating in the building trades.

For Hannover-based TAIFUN Software, that presented a challenge. There were several small-footprint databases its developers could have chosen to use in their trades-optimized ERP system that were capable of providing a touch-free experience—but they typically sacrificed performance to enable ease of use. Others could provide the high performance TAIFUN wanted to deliver, but at the cost of ease of use. To ensure ongoing optimal performance, a customer would need access to an IT team or at least a skilled database manager. Most of the companies TAIFUN was targeting had neither.

But TAIFUN did find exactly the solution its ERP system needed—a high performance, small-footprint system that users never have to touch—in the database now known as Actian Zen.

The Solution

TAIFUN's use of Actian Zen actually predates the existence of Actian Zen. TAIFUN began using Zen's progenitor, Btrieve, back in the late 1980s. Btrieve provided the power and small footprint TAIFUN needed even then to drive its fledgling ERP system. This early incarnation of the TAIFUN ERP solution ran on Windows-based PCs and was ideal for firms at all levels of the building trade industry. It enabled even the smallest company to gain the power of an integrated, multi-user ERP solution, and because it was optimized for the building trades, it provided the core functionality every firm needed.

Over time, TAIFUN continued to rely on the power of the Btrieve database to facilitate high-performance execution as it added even more functionality and services to its ERP system. The Btrieve database itself came to be known as the Pervasive database, and it remained fixed in the center of TAIFUN's ERP system—even as TAIFUN's ERP system evolved to run both on a small PC and in a more distributed client-server configuration that attracted larger customers in the German and Austrian building trade and crafts industries.

TAIFUN's reliance upon this powerful database did not go unexamined over time. Dedicated to meeting the needs of its customers, TAIFUN continued to look at the field of database products—and continued to be convinced that it had made the right choice all along.

“We did look at other databases,” says Steffen Goldenstein, Head of Development at TAIFUN, “but we still use the Btrieve access layer, even today when running Actian Zen. We don't use SQL or the relational side of Zen, so if we compare what we're using to any of the relational databases that are out there today, there's no comparison. Actian Zen is extremely fast, and that's what we need. A relational database just can't perform in this way.”

Pervasive eventually evolved into today's Actian Zen, and TAIFUN's ERP system has evolved alongside it. Today, TAIFUN's ERP system offers modules for everything from job costing and accounting to materials management, time tracking, document management and archiving, email, and much more. The system interacts with mobile- and tablet-enabled ERP applications too which enable users on a job site to process orders, capture customer signatures, check inventory, and more throughout the course of their workday. All data sent from the field is remotely passed to the Actian Zen database.

The Benefits

For TAIFUN, power, performance, and stability for the customer remain the forces driving its reliance on Actian Zen.

“TAIFUN's ERP system is extremely fast, which is great when you're using small computers,” says Mr. Goldenstein. “A big part of that is due to the Actian Zen database. It's easy to install; it's predictable, reliable, and very responsive. The biggest thing for us was database stability. Our customers are not IT guys; they don't want to deal with database issues. We install it; they use it. They don't need to manage it. That's a big part of what our customers like about our software.”

“Everyone involved in the building trades and specialty crafts in Germany uses a specialty ERP system,” Mr. Goldenstein continues. “They need to, because there are components built into the system that won't be there in a more generic ERP system. Everyone in Germany and Austria works directly with wholesalers, so the ERP software needs to integrate with those wholesalers. Many of our customers are small firms running their operations on a single computer. Others have client-server implementations that support hundreds of users. We've never had any problem with Actian Zen or its predecessors. It's always stable and it's always reliable. That's a huge benefit for us.”

The Actian Zen database storage location and footprint flexibility also adds compelling value for TAIFUN's customers. “Our customers are very sensitive to issues of data privacy and control,” says Mr. Goldenstein, “so it's important to them that they be able to determine where the data resides. They're not necessarily excited about storing data in the cloud, and Actian Zen makes it easy to keep the data wherever they want. The data sets don't require a lot of storage space.”

Ultimately, all the benefits attributable to Actian Zen accrue in obscurity. Few of TAIFUN's customers have any idea that they're using Actian Zen. The company makes no attempt to hide this fact, but the database is effectively embedded in the TAIFUN ERP system, and that's what customers see. The small size of the data set? That appears to be a feature of TAIFUN ERP. The recently-enhanced database encryption features? That too appears to be just another benefit delivered by TAIFUN ERP.

“We make no attempt to hide the fact that there's an Actian database at the heart of our ERP solution,” says Mr. Goldenstein, “but neither do we draw attention to it. The database is in the background of our ERP system. It's there, and it does its job without drawing attention to itself. Many of our customers may not even know there's a database involved.”

And that's just the way it should be. In the end, Actian Zen is designed to operate without drawing attention to itself. It performs without incident. It runs without crashing. It streaks along without the ongoing ministrations of a database administrator. In short, it empowers TAIFUN's ERP solution to do exactly what it is designed to do: deliver excellent operational support to the people building the structures—and infrastructures—of 21st century Europe.



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