

## Verastream Helps *The Miami Herald* Take Legacy Applications to the Web

New customer self-service site rolled out in four weeks



Serving a million readers daily (and 1.2 million on Sundays), *The Miami Herald* is a prize-winning newspaper and a flagship of the Knight Ridder publishing chain. The *Herald* wanted to improve customer service by unifying legacy application functionality with web-based customer facing applications.

Attachmate® Verastream® Host Integrator gave them the capability to seamlessly integrate their HP e3000-based legacy applications with web technology. The result is a customer self-service solution that has helped save money and pave the way for subsequent technological innovations at the *Herald*.

“Verastream was just what we needed to provide a real-time web interface to our circulation system, improving customer service, streamlining operations, and saving us money.”

- Todd Williams  
Assistant Director for  
Systems Development  
Miami Herald

### A New Vision for Customer Service

Because they were paying per-call rates to the Knight Ridder customer contact center, the *Herald* was eager to introduce the cost-saving measures made possible by fully automated web self-service. Todd Williams, assistant director for systems development at the *Herald*, knew that the ultimate solution would be a customer web interface synced up closely with the newspaper's back-end systems.

Up to this point, the *Herald* was dealing with separate HP e3000-based applications, which over the years had evolved into distinct information silos. Williams wanted to leverage those systems to improve the way the company connected to customers. Although subscriber transactions were available over the Internet, there was no real-time processing involved.

“Even though it was a web form, e-mail was still the transport method,” Williams explained. “That required somebody on the back end to receive

### QUICK VIEW

#### Problem

- No ability to automate back-end processes for customer self-service.

#### Solution

- Used Verastream to integrate legacy host functionality with an easy web interface.

#### Results

- Improved customer satisfaction, with real-time back-end processing.
- A rapid-application development platform in place for future projects.

the e-mail, process the transaction, and respond.”

The *Herald* wanted to reach out to customers and acquire new accounts by offering state-of-the-art business practices. Here are the subscriber transactions that the *Herald* decided to make available on the web:

- Get subscription prices.
- Start a new subscription.
- Stop service temporarily.
- Restart service.
- Report service errors.
- Check account status.
- Make a payment.

### Powering Host Applications With Verastream

Verastream Host Integrator gave the *Herald* a way to take all those functions on line without altering host code or disrupting daily operations. Verastream encapsulates mainframe data and logic via the screen interface, exposing business processes as web services, XML, Java, and .NET components. The services or components can be mixed, matched, and reused to build composite applications with a new look and feel.

Thanks to Verastream's “excellent usability,” said Williams, the *Herald* IT staff was able to write the web scripts for the implementation with a minimum of support from Attachmate. He added that the project at the *Herald* was completed in about a month.

## See This Solution in Action

You can explore the customer options available through *The Miami Herald* online service center at <http://heraldsubscriptions.com/>. This web site shows how Verastream makes it possible for subscribers to handle their own transactions by interfacing, in real time, with the newspaper's back-end systems

## About *The Miami Herald* Implementation

The *Herald's* web application was developed using Active Server Pages that communicate directly with Verastream. If customers want to

access their account information through the web interface, they can enter their account number or enter a combination of their phone number and house address number. In the latter case, Verastream finds the account by phone number and then verifies that the house number is correct before granting access through the web site.

The HP e3000 legacy applications make liberal use of pop-up windows and scrolling menus, which Verastream handles as well. To maximize performance, Verastream session pools are used, reducing the need to re-establish connection and login execution processes.

Because Verastream allows for the abstraction of host data, it brought the convenience of table procedures to the process. With table procedures, ASPs can make a single call to Verastream that navigates throughout the host, collects data from a variety of entities, filters the result set, and returns exactly what is needed. This method minimizes the round trips between the web server and the Verastream server, so Verastream can communicate at maximum speed with the *Herald's* HP e3000 host.

Client-side form validation was also implemented to ensure data integrity before sending it to the host. By notifying the customer of errors before submitting the form data to the host, the interface is much faster and easier to use than before the Verastream solution.

## A Win-Win Business Decision

Customer response to the online service has been consistently positive. As use of the web site steadily builds momentum, site traffic has tripled since its early rollout stage. The application efficiency allows customers to enter a delivery change order as late as 7 p.m. and still get results the next day.

New subscribers who sign up via the web site are set up for EZ Renew, a *Herald* service that automatically charges customers' credit cards when their subscriptions are due to expire. More than 1,500 existing subscribers have converted to this payment system as well. The benefit to the customer: convenience. The benefit to the *Herald*: an ongoing guaranteed subscriber base.

When the *Herald* offered a consumer discount card that gave EZ Renew members greater savings than non-members, the web site proved to be a winner once again. About 30 percent of the online card orders resulted in simultaneous EZ Renew signups—a far greater percentage than the phone-in card orders did. This clearly illustrated that the web site is more effective than the contact center when it comes to influencing subscriber decisions.

## The Bottom Line

"Verastream was just what we needed to provide a real-time web interface to our circulation system," Williams said. "The web site is substantially

improving customer service, streamlining our operations, and saving us money." In fact, Williams reported, the *Herald* saved \$16,000 in the cost of serving customers the first year alone.

Going forward, Williams and his team have found additional uses for the Verastream technology on the advertising side of their business. What is now a manual process for promotion-card order placement, database entry, and client billing will soon be replaced by a new self-service web interface. Although advertising clients won't see what's going on behind the scenes, Verastream will handle synchronization with the *Herald's* ad-sales application (AdMarc) on the HP e3000.

"Our vision of what it's possible to do with Verastream has expanded as we've used the technology," said Williams. "Now that we've seen what it can do, we're planning all kinds of future projects involving other legacy applications."

## Using Verastream at *The Miami Herald*

Here's how Verastream enables the *Herald* to accelerate new business initiatives without jeopardizing the rich store of business data residing on their host applications:

- 1 Using Verastream design tools, a *Herald* web developer works with an end user to model the host functionality.
- 2 Navigating through the host-application screens, they simply click on the fields that will be used in the new application, leaving the original application intact.
- 3 The result of the modeling process is a component that can perform any transaction supported by the host application, including screen navigation, reads, and writes.

No host programming expertise is needed for the entire process. And the web developer doesn't have to acquire any new programming skills because Verastream lets him use the language and development tools of his choice. The newly created web application accesses the service on the Verastream server during run time.



**Corporate Headquarters**  
1500 Dexter Avenue North  
Seattle, Washington 98109  
TEL 206 217 7500  
800 872 2829  
FAX 206 217 7515

**EMEA Headquarters**  
The Netherlands  
TEL +31 71 368 1100  
FAX +31 71 368 1181

**Asia Pacific Headquarters**  
Australia  
TEL +61 3 9825 2300  
FAX +61 3 9825 2399

**Latin America Headquarters**  
Mexico  
TEL +52 55 9178 4970  
FAX +52 55 5540 4886

WEB [attachmate.com](http://attachmate.com)  
E-MAIL [info@attachmate.com](mailto:info@attachmate.com)

For regional office information, visit [www.attachmate.com](http://www.attachmate.com).