



RealPlus accelerates online real estate listings service

Gains 20 percent performance improvement with IBM Informix 11.5

Overview

Challenge

Accelerate response times of online real estate listings service for Manhattan real estate agents.

Solution

RealPlus has had a trouble-free 25-year history running its applications on IBM Informix. Working with IBM Business Partners One Point Solutions and Unique Systems, RealPlus today uses Informix 11.5 for high performance, reliable and hassle-free delivery of its real estate services.

Benefits

Estimated 20 percent increase in performance; seamless upgrade to Informix 11.5 in only 15 minutes; hassle-free administration for higher productivity of users and RealPlus staff.

In the real estate industry, it's location, location, location that drives sales. However, for RealPlus, LLC, which provides the New York City real estate industry with an online listings database service, the key to satisfying real estate agents is performance, performance, performance.

RealPlus provides agents with an online real estate listings service covering residential properties in Manhattan, one of the world's hottest, most expensive and most competitive real estate markets. More than 300 Manhattan real estate firms use RealPlus' online application to access their own listings and shared listings from RealPlus' collective client list. That list reads like a who's who of real estate brokerages in Manhattan, including some of the largest firms in the city. The service supports the entire range of brokerage activities, enabling agents to search for listings by geographic location and demographics, email reports to their clients, conduct competitive market analysis and much more.

RealPlus also offers the RealPlus Online Listings Exchange (R.O.L.E.X.), the largest listings exchange service in New York City. R.O.L.E.X., which runs on an IBM® System x® server, enables agents to share information about their listings with more than 500 firms in Manhattan. Realtors can access these services from their PCs or a range of mobile devices, including BlackBerry, iPhone, iPad and Android devices.

A solid, robust platform

For RealPlus, delivering fast, uninterrupted access to listings is essential so agents can provide their clients with responsive service.



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—Eric Gordon, Managing Director, RealPlus



“We’re moving five million transactions through our systems on a daily basis,” says Eric Gordon, managing director of RealPlus. “It’s astronomical the amount of data that people wouldn’t receive if we couldn’t provide it.”

To meet its clients’ needs, the company wanted a reliable, high performance and flexible database engine and chose IBM Informix® database software.

“With Informix running on the Linux operating system, we have a product that’s very marketable, truly allowing us to provide our customers with information on demand,” says Gordon. “I get asked all the time, ‘Why Informix? Why not SQL Server or some of the other options out there?’ It’s because we’ve been doing this for 25 years, and we have never—no exaggeration—lost data. We also have zero downtime due to the database server.”

Solution components:

Software

- IBM® Informix® 11.5
- IBM Informix 4GL
- Red Hat Enterprise Linux®

Servers

- IBM System x®

IBM Business Partners

- One Point Solutions
 - Unique Systems
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—Eric Gordon

Increasing performance by 20 percent

With the introduction of Informix 11.5, RealPlus saw an opportunity to improve application response times even more.

“With each major release of Informix, we’ve seen a performance boost—not just when agents do searches, but also with imports, exports, loads and unloads,” says Gordon. “We realized an estimated 20 percent performance boost by upgrading to Informix 11.5, and that’s without doing anything else. It’s such an easy transition to get that extra performance—it’s gold.”

During its implementation of Informix 11.5, the company also took advantage of the dynamic SQL (structured language query) support in Informix stored procedures. Before, database administrators were needed to program queries based on possible agent searches and define which database rows and tables the system should check. Dynamic SQL enables the applications to create SQL queries based on the end user’s search criteria without the need for additional programming. This makes a huge difference in the company’s ability to adjust to changing market trends. For example, during the downturn in the real estate market, agents began searching for “value priced” listings, those listings that are priced lower than their comparables as well as listings that have had a price drop within a specified period of time.

“In an application such as ours, there’s a staggering amount of criteria that agents want to be able to search by—price, number of rooms, number of bedrooms, location, fireplace, doorman; the list goes on,” says Gordon. “And with Informix, these queries just rip through the database, producing near instantaneous results. Now with dynamic SQL, the system can do analysis on the fly and provide results from any database field. It really allows agents to find listings for their clients that they wouldn’t necessarily find without this functionality.”

“One Point Solutions has been dedicated to Informix since we opened the doors 13 years ago, and personally I’ve been a devotee for over 20 years. I can’t say enough about what IBM has done to make the product even better than ever—and to preserve its intensely dedicated legion of users.”

—Ron Flannery, President, One Point Solutions

Expert advice from One Point Solutions

Throughout the years, IBM Business Partner One Point Solutions has provided RealPlus with guidance on how to gain the most from its Informix implementation and has recommended upgrades and optimized license costs based on RealPlus’ needs. The company’s data experts offer clients “one point of contact” for the latest in IBM data and information management solutions, providing one trusted partner for RealPlus’ critical performance and uptime requirements.

“One Point Solutions has been dedicated to Informix since we opened the doors 13 years ago, and personally I’ve been a devotee for over 20 years,” says Ron Flannery, president, One Point Solutions. “I can’t say enough about what IBM has done to make the product even better than ever—and to preserve its intensely dedicated legion of users.”

One Point Solutions—together with Unique Systems—an IBM Business Partner and Linux specialist—helped RealPlus move from Informix 7 on SCO UNIX® to Informix 10 on Red Hat Linux® running on an IBM System x server, and later upgrade to Informix 11.5.

“I won’t go to anyone other than One Point Solutions for advice,” says Gordon. “There’s really no one better. One Point has given us solid advice over the years, including recommending Unique Systems to help with the actual Informix installations.”

A quick and easy upgrade

Upgrading each of its client’s systems from Informix 10 to Informix 11.5 took only 15 minutes. “It’s a drop-in upgrade,” says Gordon. “We coordinated a time with each client when we could shut them down for a few minutes, and all we had to do was turn off the engine, move the new engine in place and then turn it back on. They were immediately up and running. It was a 15 minute process in all.”

As part of the upgrade progress, Informix 4GL provided the capabilities to rapidly recompile application scripts.

“With Informix 4GL, it took us less than an hour to recompile our back-end scripting for our upgrade to Informix 11.5,” says Gordon. “Other than a recompile, there were absolutely no syntax changes or anything that needed to be done. The fact that this was so easy for us is huge. We’re just too busy to deal with any roadblocks.”

Hassle-free administration

According to Gordon, a huge benefit of using Informix is that the company doesn't need a large technical staff to manage the database. The company only has five people on staff to handle IT administration. "If we have to send somebody to a client site to handle a database issue for a day, we've lost 20 percent of our workforce. Informix works, it's reliable and it's fast. If one of our client's servers crashes, Informix comes back without any data loss. It's so reliable, in fact, that we sometimes forget it's there."

The ease of administration has been vital in helping RealPlus weather current market conditions.

"The last couple of years have been a challenge in the real estate industry," says Gordon. "We've been able to stay busy and it's because of our relationships and because we run a lean operation. Informix provides the reliability and ease of administration that helps us deliver services without a large technical staff. If we needed 10 or 20 or 30 people to do what we do, we'd be in a very different place."

For more information

To learn more about IBM Informix, please contact your IBM sales representative or IBM Business Partner, or visit the following website:

ibm.com/software/data/informix

To increase the business value of Information Management software, participate in independently run Information Management User Groups around the world. Learn about opportunities near you at:

ibm.com/data/management/community.html

For more information on RealPlus, visit: www.realplisonline.com

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January 2011
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