

CONFTEC and Zend: Agile Delivery of Jewelry Retail Solutions



CUSTOMER:

Based in Bad Homburg, Germany, CONFTEC is an independent software vendor (ISV) responsible for the software development and IT infrastructure management of major EU jewelry retailers, including 123Gold, Germany's leading wedding ring provider. CONFTEC's applications are currently in use in more than nine countries. The system manages 47,000 orders per year with a total annual turnover of 55 million euros.

CHALLENGE:

CONFTEC needed to find an enterprise-ready application platform to build customized retail applications and a custom ERP application from the ground up. The solution would need to provide CONFTEC with a custom-built online retail platform that would enable quick development and ongoing innovation.

SOLUTION:

After comparing languages and solutions including Java, Perl and ASP, CONFTEC chose to build its system using PHP and Zend. The company uses Zend Studio for creating and maintaining its extensive codebase, and Zend Server to manage and monitor its applications.

BENEFITS:

CONFTEC has experienced ongoing benefits from using Zend solutions and PHP. Zend Studio and Zend Server have enabled the company to gain more control over their applications while saving time. With Zend Server's code tracing and detailed error messages, CONFTEC can diagnose potential issues early to avoid slow performance and system crashes, contributing to a better user experience.

Specializing in High-Volume E-Commerce

CONFTEC is an ISV (independent software vendor) that specializes in developing and supporting retail web applications for the jewelry market. The seven-employee company has made a name for itself by providing a retail platform that enables the mass customization of jewelry products. With the CONFTEC product configurator, jewelry sites' end users can designate a range of features for their rings, from width to stone setting, and instantly view an image of their customized ring. CONFTEC runs the entire sales cycle of each ring, from configuration to production, inside of its web applications. In addition to its cutting-edge product configurator, the firm is known for developing innovative features and optimizing workflows for customers in minimal time. CONFTEC's entire software development process for its clients' websites happens in-house, from coding to graphic design, SEO and online marketing.

European jewelry leaders 123Gold and sister brand Acredo use CONFTEC to manage their IT backbone. The CONFTEC ERP manages 47,000 orders per year, with a total annual turnover of 40 million euros in eleven countries. 123Gold alone has more than 600 active users and 52 stores in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. For its other clients, Acredo, Boucheron and Meril, CONFTEC supports stores in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, the Netherlands, France, Denmark, Spain, Estonia, China and Japan.

PHP and Zend: Enterprise-Ready from the Ground Up

CONFTEC has been specializing in web-based retail applications since they were founded. "When we first initiated the concept of a web-based jewelry retail application in 2002, it was innovative for our clients, which are jewelry brands, to use a completely web-based application, something like a precursor to the cloud," said Frederik Glücks, Managing Director of CONFTEC.

CONFTEC was specifically looking for an enterprise-ready programming language and application platform on which to develop its specialized ERP and other IT services. "PHP was the language that I personally liked and thought that it was the best language for future development," said Glücks, who has experience developing in ASP, Java, Perl and SAP. "Flexibility and functionality were important reasons for adopting PHP and Zend. The great PHP community and integration with MySQL were additional reasons for adoption."

"You could say that we are always in all stages of the application development process, because we're always developing new features or improving existing modules."

Frederik Glücks, Managing Director of CONFTEC

“Our most important project is the 123Gold wedding ring configurator, which was developed with PHP, MySQL, HTML, CSS and JavaScript,” said Glücks. “The most impressive part is how the configurator creates individual pictures of rings and other jewelry, an application we created in-house by using PHP with the GD open source graphics generation tool.”

Ongoing Development and Client Satisfaction with Zend

CONFTEC’s production and development environments, though located in different cities, are architected identically, with production running as virtual machines in a Hamburg data center. By deploying Zend Server in both development and production, CONFTEC can use identical environments to test applications in development and then deploy them to production. This is a distinct advantage, as the company can avoid potential errors in transitions between development and production. Zend Server is currently running on two Red Hat and Apache-based application servers in each environment. Database servers are also based on Red Hat and use MySQL enterprise. The company runs Zend Studio and Zend Server both in Mac OS and in Windows for development.

Since its founding, CONFTEC has had a positive experience using Zend’s solutions. “You could say that we are always in all stages

of the application development process, because we’re always developing new features or improving existing modules,” said Glücks. “By using Zend Studio and Zend Server for our constantly-evolving applications, we’ve been able to gain better control over our applications while saving time and ensuring quality. Detailed error messages and code tracing give us a better understanding of how software is performing and catch problems before they arise, avoiding slow performance or system crashes. This is a great benefit to our company, clients and end users. We’ve been able to improve the user experience and satisfaction with our applications, because we get bug reports before our users have to experience glitches.”

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Glücks added: “I would say we already have achieved our return on investment.”