



CASE STUDY

TRANSFORMING ORDER WORKFLOWS
USING VALENCE APPS BUILT ON IBM i

INDUSTRY

TRANSPORTATION, LOGISTICS,
SUPPLY CHAIN AND STORAGE



Major Fulfillment Company Transforms its Order Management System and More with Valence

VALENCE IS AN ENTERPRISE
APPLICATION DEVELOPMENT PLATFORM
THAT EMPOWERS IT AND BUSINESS
LEADERS TO TRANSFORM OPERATIONS
ON, AND OFF, IBM i.



It was truly remarkable what I created with Valence in just a couple of hours. When I saw that not only could I replace all of these spreadsheets but I could use Valence to create apps that would implement efficiencies across all areas of our business, I was like, 'oh my!'

Greg Wilburn
Director of IT,
Total Biz Fulfillment



It began with a search for a solution that would reduce the need for employees and management to rely on complicated spreadsheets to do their work. It went on to become a complete modernization of the company's order-processing applications that dramatically boosted productivity. That's the journey Greg Wilburn has been taking with Valence by CNX. Greg is the director of IT at Total Biz Fulfillment, a U.S.-based order processing and fulfillment company for roughly 65 manufacturers that provide everything from inventory control to order fulfillment to accounts receivable services.

"Because of the large number of companies we serve, the nature of our business is very complex," says Greg. "For years we were doing a host of mission-critical functions within a wide array of highly customized spreadsheets. My team would run reports from our IBM i ERP applications using tools I created to populate Excel spreadsheets. Every day management and employees would manipulate these spreadsheets to look for problems, see trends, and take needed actions. However, as our business grew this method became a massive headache."

SEEKING AN ALTERNATIVE

Greg knew that if he and his small development team were to replace the functions of these spreadsheets with the necessary RPG logic and green screens, the development work would take a huge amount of time. Given many other development priorities, this just wasn't practical. Instead, Greg decided to search for a third-party solution that could pull the needed data from the company's ERP applications, perform the necessary logic, then put the results into interactive, intuitive apps that users and management could use in place of spreadsheets and having to navigate applications on green screens. During his search, **Greg discovered Valence from CNX, and while using a trial version of the Valence Nitro App Builder he created an app that replaced one of these spreadsheets and was amazed at how little time it took.**

"It was truly remarkable what I created with Valence in just a couple of hours," says Greg. "When I saw that not only could I replace all of these spreadsheets but I could use Valence to create apps that would implement efficiencies across all areas of our business, I was like, 'oh my!' The hard part was deciding what to do first."



Valence is a low-code, application development platform that includes a full suite of development and runtime tools for creating and deploying truly modern applications on IBM i. Designed from the ground up for IBM i and the DB2 database, Valence makes it possible to quickly enhance existing RPG functionality through the creation of new apps and dashboards. Featuring a responsive interface that delivers an optimized runtime experience for desktops, laptops and mobile devices, Valence runs entirely through an IBM i-integrated Apache server—no additional servers or hardware are required.

TRANSFORMING A CUMBERSOME SYSTEM

After purchasing Valence, Greg decided to first create apps that would help the company's customer service team eliminate having to sift through numerous spreadsheets and reports to find and manually resolve orders that were being held for various reasons.

"Every day our company processes thousands of orders and we would regularly run massive reports detailing held orders and would need to organize the data in spreadsheets by department and users, depending on the manufacturer," says Greg. "Because of all of the manufacturers we serve it was quite a time-consuming process. With Valence I created an app that customer service folks could access on a PC or tablet that shows only the held orders that each user needs to work through. The app automatically recognizes the user, and from one screen they can release or correct orders, change ship dates, or even call the customer directly."

BIG IMPROVEMENT IN SYSTEM PERFORMANCE, LESS RELIANCE ON RPG DEVELOPERS

Over time, Greg created dozens of apps that have essentially modernized the company's entire order management system. In addition to bringing all kinds of efficiencies to the way orders are handled, company management found to their surprise that because of this modernization new employees are being trained more quickly and employee retention has been significantly increased.

"Before I created the order management apps with Valence, whenever we would bring on younger employees in the department, we had a troubling level of turnover because younger people just don't like working on green screens. But since order management has been modernized not only are we noticing that the turnover rate in these jobs has dropped significantly, the training time for new employees is much faster. We attribute all of this to our order processing functions being so much more intuitive and user friendly."

Since modernizing the company's order management system, Greg has gone on to create apps that benefit other areas of the company. There are inventory management apps that send information to large screens in the warehouse showing work that needs to be done along with stats about turnaround times and more. There are new apps that the accounts receivable department has begun to use to make their jobs easier. And Greg has even created apps that provide self-service IT functions to department managers related to varying on and off devices as well as enabling or disabling users, all of which has saved Greg and his IT staff time.

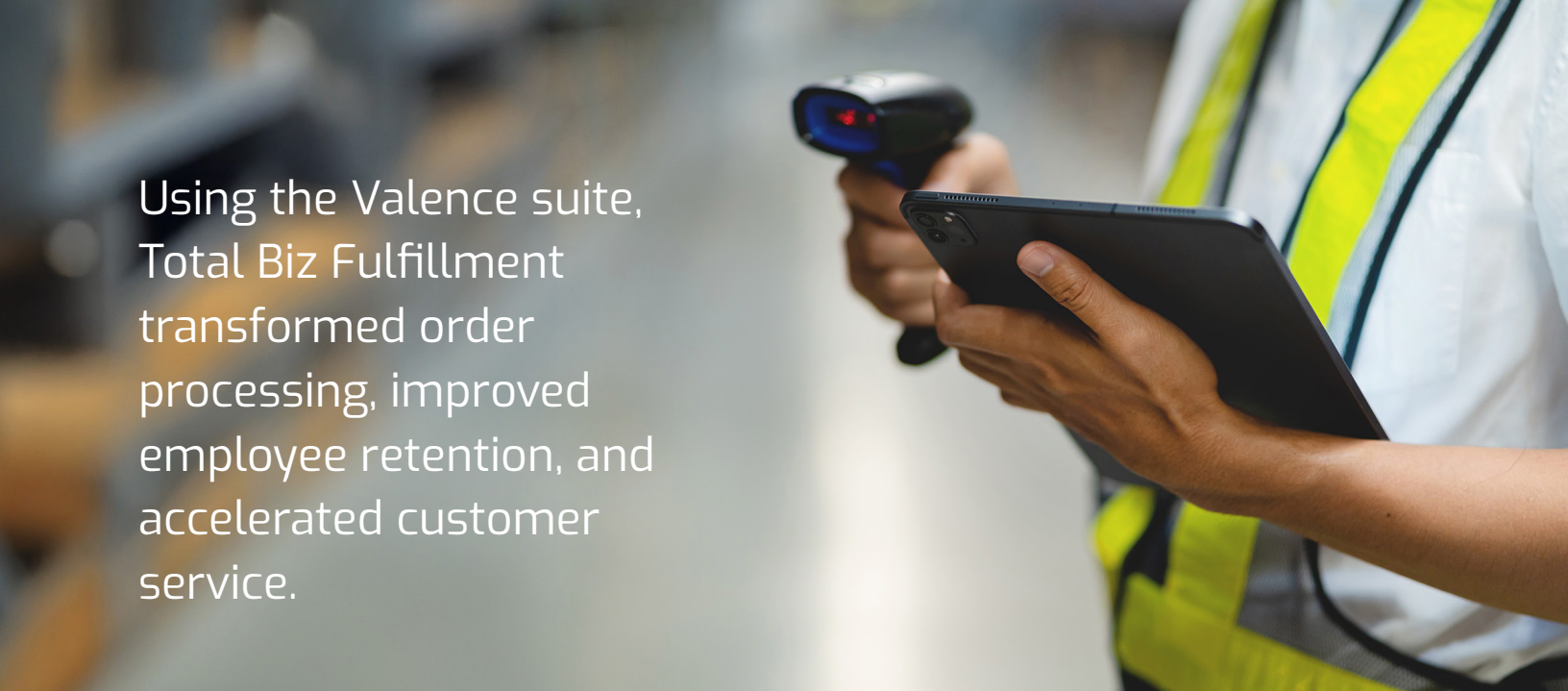
LEAVING GREEN SCREEN BEHIND

"I created all of these apps in Valence without having to be anything close to expert in Java or JavaScript," says Greg. "I'm able to create professional looking applications that no one will ever be able to look at and say you're running your business on an IBM i. There's nothing green screen about any of these apps. No longer do I feel constrained by our ERP applications and the old way of doing development."

"And the Valence Assistant function is amazing," continues Greg. "I can click the Help Me button when I'm working in the Valence app builder and describe in detail, and in plain English, what it is I want to create and it provides me with the JavaScript code that will do most, if not all, of what I want to accomplish. Time and time again what it comes back with is really, really close to what I need, if not exactly correct. For instance, let's say I've got a data source and I'm building a form, I can literally describe what I want on the form and it will look at the names of the fields and the descriptions in the fields and put them all together in a format and in a logical order that makes perfect sense. Compare that to creating a form on a green screen using RPG!"



Screens from Total Biz's *Held Orders* application, which replaced 60 iterations of the same report that ran twice weekly, allowing them to manage held orders by type of hold, company, or Customer Relations Lead (user) responsible.



Using the Valence suite, Total Biz Fulfillment transformed order processing, improved employee retention, and accelerated customer service.

Bottom line, what Valence has done for our company is to substantially increase visibility and make us more agile. The apps I've created with Valence give our people the ability to quickly see what needs attention while providing the functions to take any necessary action on the spot.

In addition to using the Valence Portal and Valence Nitro App Builder to create the apps that have transformed order management at Total Biz, Greg uses several of the Valence utilities that CNX offers.

"One of my favorite Valence utilities is Nitro iAdmin," says Greg. "I just click it and I see whether there's a message on any job, I can see out queues, job queues, system settings, subsystems, users, Apache servers, devices and a lot more. And I can do that on any kind of device, even tablet or smartphone. I also use Nitro File Editor all the time, which is so much easier to use than DBU."

A POSITIVE EXPERIENCE IN EVERY WAY

Greg is not only impressed with Valence as a solution, his experience working with the people at CNX has been equally impressive.

"These are the best people I have ever worked with when it comes to software vendors, and I've been doing IT in the IBM i space for 28 years," says Greg. "They've always come through for me, and they are always there to help should I need it. Plus, CNX has always been receptive to my suggestions for enhancing their products. In fact, there have been several times when I have said to them, 'boy it would be nice if I was able to do such and such' and then that feature appears in a new release of Valence. And they deliver new releases every few months—they don't sit still at all."



"Bottom line, what Valence has done for our company is to substantially increase visibility and make us more agile," continues Greg. "The apps I've created with Valence give our people the ability to quickly see what needs attention while providing the functions to take any necessary action on the spot. Managers can see in real time how their department is performing and then direct resources where they're needed most. As a company, Total Biz Fulfillment is always looking for ways to continually improve and be more agile. This is what has made us successful and Valence helps enormously with this mission."