

customer success story: by Heidi V. Anderson

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Aspect Security Switches to Windward Reports

Company Background

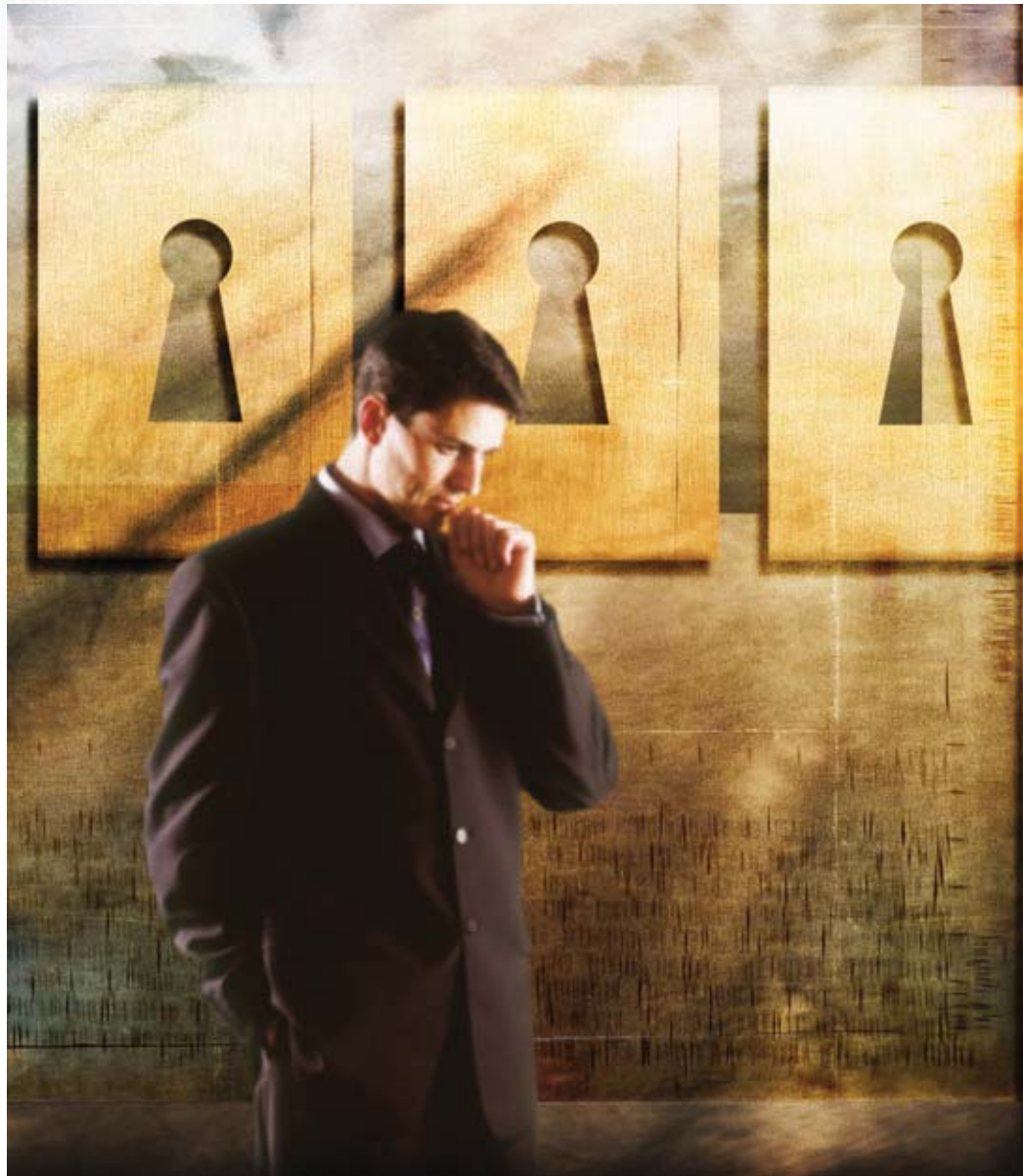
Aspect Security (www.aspectsecurity.com) specializes in all aspects of application security, helping a wide range of organizations, from small e-commerce sites to Fortune 500 corporations to solve the causes of their application vulnerabilities. This involves extensive reports outlining design and implementation review, development training, security code review, penetration testing and security policy development. Their customers include large financial organizations, system integrators, and e-commerce providers.

The Challenge

Aspect Security supplies each of its customers with a detailed report for each Web application it secures. The report contains a summary of what Aspect Security did and how they did it. But the reporting tool they were using, JasperReports, just wasn't up to the task.

For example, Aspect had difficulty using Jasper's sub-reports to extract data from the database with multiple and varied queries. Many little flaws in the output took a long time to work around. Even when using the JasperReports Eclipse plug-in, getting the report properly formatted wasn't possible.

"Jasper's RTF output just didn't



work for us," says Arshan Dabirsiaghi, application security engineer at Aspect Security. "It generates lots of text boxes instead of a real table. Our reports are complex and have to look professional. We simply couldn't achieve that with Jasper."

The Solution

CEO Jeff Williams had enough. In late 2005, he asked Dabirsiaghi to search for a solution. Dabirsiaghi visited the Windward Reports Web site and tested out the demo. Within a few days, Aspect Security decided to switch to Windward for its reporting tool.

Windward Reports' primary benefit is that it is both quick and simple to design report templates. The customizable report templates' layout, font and formatting are designed with Microsoft Word. Windward's AutoTag plug-in allows the user to add database tags in either SQL or Xpath to the report template.

Using Windward allowed Aspect Security to create highly polished reports in relatively little time. Each detailed report includes crucial findings that allow Aspect Security's customers to make informed security decisions, with fields and images that describe the risk, severity level, and remediation alternatives. The report contains several sections that each use different queries.

The previous solution, an Eclipse plug-in called JasperAssistant, required the developers to tweak the attributes of each object and sub-object by hand, and, says Williams, "The complexity started to explode." Not so with Windward. The developers don't have to set character styles on each object; instead, they use Word's ability to set styles globally, all in one place.

Aspect Security found that the Windward Reports wizard allows the user to create a wide variety of reports on the fly, simply by choosing what data to include and when to run the report. The company can schedule

reports to run on its own timetables, whether it be hourly, daily, weekly or another time frame. The report output can be in PDF, RTF, HTML, WordML, SpreadsheetML, XLS, or text format.

And, Dabirsiaghi says, that output is clear and easy to maintain. Whereas, with the Jasper engine, even minor updates to report formats would require major effort. With Windward Reports, that isn't the case. Aspect can easily make changes to the report format. The company can also modify the generated report or make custom report formats for particular customers.

Windward Reports' ease-of-use is backed by a powerful reporting engine. Because it's Java-based (there is also a .NET version), Aspect Security found it simple to integrate Windward Reports into its system. Windward Reports is available as a Java Library and integrates directly as a reporting engine in a J2EE environment.

Aspect Security has saved significant developer time by implementing Windward Reports. Developers first took the existing report, done by hand, and then invested several weeks of hard work re-creating the report using JasperAssistant. With Windward Reports, that entire process took less than a week.

"The development time is where we see a real advantage," Williams says. "It's an order of magnitude faster to develop a report with Windward Reports."

In addition, Windward Reports is backed by hefty documentation and timely customer support. Because JasperReports offers little documentation, each time Aspect Security developers wanted decipher a confusing error message or use a little-known feature, they'd have to perform a Web search, and that was no guarantee of success. Now, if there's a question about how a Windward Reports feature works, Aspect Security can refer to extensive online documentation, including



forums and online samples, or contact technical support via phone or email.

The Results

Now that the tool is in place, Windward Reports provides Aspect Security with significant time savings. Dabirsiaghi estimates the use of Windward Reports is saving the company nearly 10 employee hours per report.

"The speed of design is definitely saving us time," says Dabirsiaghi. "Compared to JasperReports, Windward Reports has won the first round."

About Windward Studios:

Windward Studios has been in business since 1995. Based in Boulder, Colorado, the company was formed to develop innovative software products for both enterprise and individual customers. Windward Reports is the only comprehensive report generator to use Microsoft Word as a layout tool, thus cutting the learning curve to virtually nil while saving time and money for both technical and non-technical users alike.