



Case Study:  
Spread COM and Tab Pro

Sales Force Application for Gerber Products

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## Introduction

Gerber Products Company, located in Fremont Michigan, began producing baby food in 1928. Gerber employs over 6,000 people and is recognized as the world leader in the development, manufacturing and marketing of food and care products for children from birth through age three.

Gerber offers nearly 200 food products and over 300 baby care items labeled in 16 different languages and sold in over 80 countries. Gerber leads the almost \$1 billion U.S. retail baby food market with a 65-70 percent share.

Gerber maintains one of the worlds largest private research facilities dedicated to addressing the needs of infants and young children. Gerber Life Insurance was formed in 1967 and has more than \$13 billion of life insurance in force and insures more than two million people in the U.S. and Puerto Rico. Gerber has recently merged with two other divisions of the Novartis parent company to form the new Consumer Health division.

“We saved considerable time by using Spread...”

Larry Smith  
Novartis  
(parent company of Gerber)

## The Challenge

Gerber's U.S. sales force was using an Excel spreadsheet located on the corporate LAN to enter their yearly sales plan and monthly sales forecast for their respective region. The concerns about using the spreadsheet were as follows:

The lack of integrity of the data, since one salesperson could accidentally corrupt the data entered by another salesperson.

- The lack of integrity of the formulas in the cells.
- Difficulty tracking key customers that needed to be forecasted.

- Limited backup/recovery of the data in case it was lost or corrupted.
- Only one person could update the spreadsheet at a time. 50+ users needed access.
- Spreadsheet took up a lot of 'real estate' and a lot of scrolling was involved to move around to the locations to enter the data.
- They had to manually enter data, such as actual sales, that was available from other sources.

## The Proposed Solution



VB was chosen for a couple of reasons:

- High presence as a RAD development tool.
- MS Office is a standard tool suite at Gerber.

Spread and Tab Pro were chosen for the following reasons:

- Recommended by Gerber's Costa Rica subsidiary.
- FarPoint is an established provider of add on tools.
- Spread provided the spreadsheet look and feel that the users were already accustomed to seeing in their Excel application.
- Tab Pro provided simplicity from the user's perspective and the power to dynamically generate tab pages based on the existence of data.

## Development Project

### Development Process

- Used a RAD/prototyping approach where forms were mocked up on VB and presented to senior management. They would suggest changes and get to see the functionality of the forms to get familiar with the flow of the application.
- Involved sales information specialists in the project design.

### Barriers

- Time – had to deliver very quickly, only had a couple of months to develop.
- Developer knowledge – This was our first VB app. We were also introducing new tools such as Spread, Tab Pro and DB2 on AIX.
- Remote users – Had to make the application work from remote locations to update a central database.
- End user's comfort – Had to make the application easy to use for salespeople that were not accustomed to using a specialized application.

### Development Staff

- 2 full time developers.
- 1 part time consultant used to make application coding suggestions.
- 1 part time DBA.
- 1 part time data analyst.

### Completion Time

- 3.5 months

**Project Overview**

- 12 forms (containing 10 Spread controls & 11 Tab Pro controls).
- 4 modules.
- Approximately 13,000 lines of code.

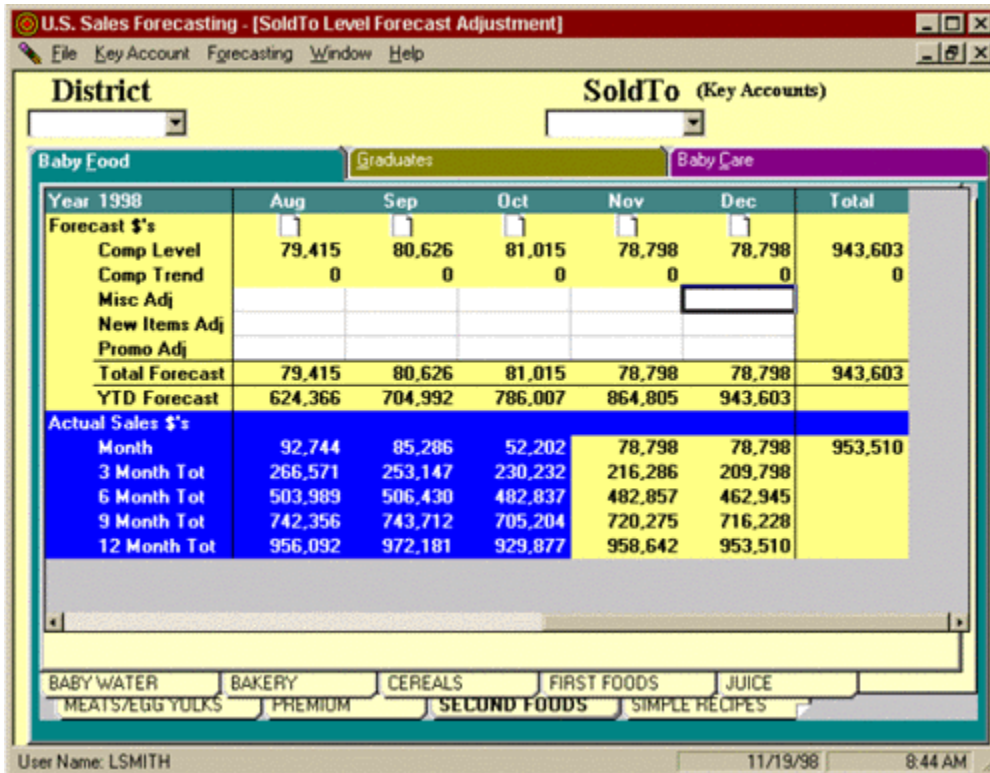


Figure: Gerber U.S. Sales Forecasting Screen with Spreadsheet and Tabs

## Project Success

### Benefits of Using Spread

We saved considerable time by using Spread because it allowed us to easily create a data layout where we could use formulas in the cells to calculate totals and averages. We could freeze cells, hide cells and allow the user to scroll through data using scroll bars and check for data entry errors. If we had to use individual text boxes provided by VB we would not have met our deadline because it would have taken too much time to define the characteristics of each text box. With Spread, we did not have to define the characteristics of each cell, we could apply the characteristics to the range of cells. The other advantage was that it already duplicated the spreadsheet the salespeople were already using to do their forecast and plan entries.

### Application Distribution

Application installation sets are being distributed on CD to the remote users (salespeople working from their home office) and is distributed via the LAN to users that have LAN connections (upper management). We created installation routine using InstallShield Express. The remote users are downloading the data via Lotus Notes, updating their specific district, and then sending the updates back to the central database via Lotus Notes. The LAN users, some of which are Citrix dialup clients, have direct access to the central database, which is DB2 on an AIX box at the corporate location in Fremont, MI.

### User Acceptance

All levels of the sales force including Senior Management and the Senior VP National Sales Manager began using the application.

## Conclusions

The application was successful for the following reasons: provided data integrity.

- Provided data integrity
- Allowed easy entry for plan and forecast for specific regions
- Allowed plan and forecast data to be rolled up to the national level
- Provided the salespeople with actual sales numbers and a computer-generated forecast to use as a starting point for their actual forecast
- Provided a way for the salespeople to identify their important customers
- Generally easier to use than the Excel spreadsheet

## About the Authors

This case study was submitted by:

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## More Information

For more information about FarPoint Technologies and their FarPoint Spread for COM solutions, visit them online at <http://www.FarPointSpread.com> or call them at their North American office at 919-460-4551 (or email them at [FPSales@FarPointSpread.com](mailto:FPSales@FarPointSpread.com)). You can reach them at their European office at +44 (0) 1798 812 372 (or email them at [SalesEurope@FarPointSpread.com](mailto:SalesEurope@FarPointSpread.com)).

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