

# 8 WAYS TO GROW YOUR SOFTWARE CONSULTING BUSINESS:

## USE APPLICATION GENERATION TO WIN MORE BUSINESS

**“We grew from a single-man shop to a 16 person team in five years.”**

*- Akesh Gupta, LightSpeed Solutions*

Software consulting is getting more and more competitive each year. First impressions are important when dealing with a client, so you need every advantage you can get.

Consultants need to be creative to rise above the rest. Luckily, there is an approach for rapidly developing robust prototypes to pitch prospective clients: Application Generation.

White Paper  
August 2013

Iron Speed, Inc.  
2870 Zanker Road, Suite 210  
San Jose, CA 95134  
<http://www.ironspeed.com>

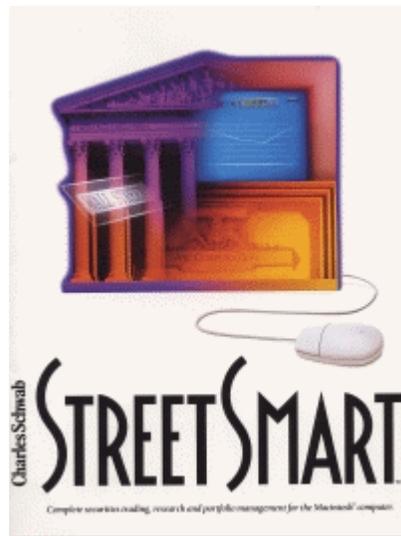
## Table of Contents

|  |          |
|--|----------|
| <b>MAKE AN IMPRESSION WITH PROTOTYPING</b> .....           | <b>3</b> |
| <b>GET MORE BUSINESS WITH APPLICATION GENERATION</b> ..... | <b>4</b> |
| 1. PROFESSIONALLY DESIGNED APPLICATIONS.....               | 4        |
| 2. FULL-FEATURED APPLICATIONS.....                         | 4        |
| 3. APPLICATION SECURITY.....                               | 5        |
| 4. REDUCE DEVELOPMENT TIME.....                            | 5        |
| 5. INCREASE PROFIT MARGINS.....                            | 5        |
| 6. CREATE MAINTENANCE REVENUE STREAMS.....                 | 5        |
| 7. THIRD-PARTY CONTROLS.....                               | 5        |
| 8. FINDING CUSTOMERS.....                                  | 6        |
| <b>HOW YOU CAN KEEP BUSINESS ONCE YOU GET IT</b> .....     | <b>6</b> |
| PREPARE.....   | 6        |
| <i>Define Your Market</i> .....                            | 7        |
| <i>Identify Your Strengths</i> .....                       | 7        |
| <i>Choose Your Niche</i> .....                             | 7        |
| <i>Differentiate From Competitors</i> .....                | 7        |
| INVEST.....  | 7        |
| <i>Prime for growth</i> .....                              | 7        |
| <i>Train your team</i> .....                               | 8        |
| REDUCE COSTS.....  | 9        |
| COMMUNICATE.....   | 9        |
| IMPRESS.....   | 10       |
| ACCELERATE.....  | 11       |
| <i>Prototype, don't document</i> .....                     | 11       |
| <i>Don't reinvent the wheel</i> .....                      | 11       |
| DELIVER.....   | 11       |
| CONTACT IRON SPEED.....                                    | 12       |

## Make An Impression With Prototyping

Back in the early 90s, before the rise of the modern internet, major brokerage firm Charles Schwab was commissioning a company to build a shrink-wrap, customer-installed trading platform to trade online. The players: Electronic Data Systems (EDS) with around 50k-100k employees, SHI Systems, Canadian version of EDS, around 10k employees, and Software Partners, Inc., a 4 person company run by Iron Speed's Chairman and Co-Founder, Alan Fisher. On paper, it seems like a mismatch at best.

Alan and his partners had one advantage. Their expertise was building shrink-wrap consumer applications, and that day he'd brought a few visual aids with him. Alan started his pitch by taking about six of his previous projects out of a bag and setting them down on the table; products that had nothing to do with the brokerage business. They were things like Data Encryption software and a Gantt Chart builder. He started giving his presentation and realized no one was paying attention. Instead, they were all fixed on looking at the boxes that he had brought in to show his experience. They were all visualizing the product that they wanted to build, called StreetSmart™ by looking at the shrink-wrap boxes. They beat out the bigger competition and got the multi-year, multi-project relationship based on this tactic.



The lesson: a visual aid can go a long way when competing for a job. Build a prototype in advance to allow the prospective client to visualize how their project is going to look and feel. Because of this, it doesn't even matter if the application is built with the customer's database. Showing the client a prototype will give you a big advantage over your competition. It would take you about two hours to create a presentation to show the client. Why not use that time to create something they can actually touch?

That begs the question, how can you build a prototype application for a prospect in two hours? The answer is simple: application generation.

“Outshine your competition with application generation so you win a bigger share of the business.” – Alan Fisher

## Get More Business with Application Generation

For the past decade, programmers around the world have chosen to use application generation to build prototypes and applications straight from a database. One tool to handle this job is Iron Speed Designer. To take advantage of this tactic using Iron Speed Designer, all you have to do is point to an existing database and generate.

Use application generation to create complete N-tier Web applications containing:

- ASPX pages with C# and Visual Basic code-behind files
- Business layer
- Data access layer
- Stored procedures

The developer has complete access to the application code.

```
Protected Overridable Sub Page_InitializeEventHandl
' Handles MyBase.Init. Registers event handler
' You can add additional Init handlers in Secti

AddHandler Me.OKButton.Button.Click, AddressOf
AddHandler Me.EditButton.Button.Click, AddressOf
End Sub

' Handles MyBase.Load. Read database data and put
' If you need to, you can add additional Load handl
Protected Overridable Sub Page_Load(ByVal sender As

' Check if user has access to this page. Redir
' or 'no access' page if not. Does not do anyth
' is not turned on, but you can override to add
Me.Authorize(Me.GetAuthorizedRoles())

' Load data only when displaying the page for t
If (Not Me.IsPostBack) Then
```

### 1. Professionally Designed Applications

There's no need for Photoshop mockups when using Iron Speed Designer. Generated application prototypes look like a graphic designer has built them because in essence, they were. 40+ page styles create a consistent look and feel across every page of your application. Page styles can be customized through the style sheet, where you can align your application with your company's unique business logic.

### 2. Full-Featured Applications

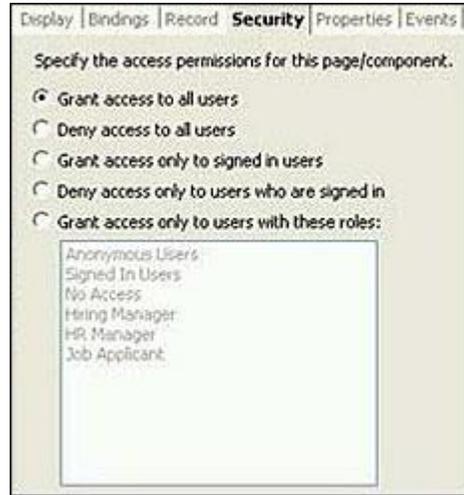
The applications built by Iron Speed Designer have more features than an application you would build by hand. Will you use every feature in every application? Probably not, but they're there in case you need them. Iron Speed Designer comes with out of the box features like:

- Data entry forms and validation
- Workflow pages and emails
- Component-level access control
- Data import and export
- Multi-database applications
- Multi-lingual applications
- Several deployment options

### 3. Application Security

Applications have built-in advanced security, which is very important in today's corporate landscape:

Role-based security helps keep your clients safe.



- Database, Active Directory, Windows, and SharePoint Groups security
- Security is handled with a wizard
- SQL Injection proof
- Role-based access control
- Data encryption

Security features are designed to work within your current security framework. To set it up, simply configure the settings, deploy and run. Meet today's tough corporate standards by using the built-in security that Iron Speed Designer has to offer.

### 4. Reduce Development Time

Once you have created one application using Iron Speed Designer, it is significantly easier to build another because it's the same process. You can create an application in just a few minutes and customize it based on customer needs – reduce complexity and reduce the unknowns. Leverage the QA Iron Speed has already done and save yourself the time and energy.

### 5. Increase Profit Margins

Using application generation does not require you to lower your project bids. In fact, many consultants use Iron Speed Designer as their 'secret profitability weapon' and make more money on every job by charging their normal rates. And, the reduced development time of application generation lets you pad fixed price bids to cover unforeseen costs.

### 6. Create Maintenance Revenue Streams

Add monthly software maintenance to your quotes to create additional revenue streams for your consulting business. Application generation greatly reduces software maintenance costs because applications are identically structured, meaning there is no learning curve from one application to the next.

### 7. Third-Party Controls

Projects sometimes require particular third-party controls to be integrated. If a client asks for specific ASP.NET controls to be added, like DevExpress,

Crystal Reports or Infragistics, it's easy to add them directly to Iron Speed Designer applications; they integrate seamlessly. Iron Speed Designer itself generates a lot of the functionality of these controls, but if the customer has exact specifications, you will have no problem adding these controls to your application.

## 8. Finding Customers

The Iron Speed MVP program is a great way to get new leads for your consulting business. The program consists of developers who have demonstrated their expertise in Iron Speed Designer and helps by sending leads to these people. Some of them have different areas of expertise than others, and customers are sent to different MVPs based on the requirements of the project. There is no one way that people use to get clients; it's more of a multi-pronged approach. Here are some examples of other tactics that MVPs use:

- **Online Training Sessions:** James Whistler of [Acid Yellow](#) in the UK uses his experience to mentor Iron Speed Designer customers and teaches specific advanced topics through a series of webinars. Iron Speed publicizes these courses via several channels.
- **Extended Training:** Canadian MVP Miles Gibson of [Milestone](#) gets more clients by offering extensive 3-day training courses called 'Boot Camps'. He keeps the class size small to ensure all questions are addressed.
- **Travel and Present:** Akesh Gutpa of [Light Speed Solutions](#) in New York takes a different approach to getting customers. He actually flies out to them and presents his prototype. Work on your public speaking skills and invest in your success.
- **Be Aware of your Surroundings:** Tim Titchmarsh of [Dot Net Architect](#) in the UK has stumbled upon business by being keen on his immediate surroundings. If you work in a office park, maybe other companies near you need applications. It certainly can't hurt to ask.

Iron Speed Designer also helps with converting the leads that you do get. Demonstrate your expertise via [technical forums](#) and people will gravitate toward you.

## How You Can Keep Business Once You Get It

OK, you've won the bid. You used Iron Speed Designer to generate a prototype and got yourself a new client. How can you ensure recurring revenue from them? You must use more of an integrated strategy to keep clients happy: prepare, invest, reduce, communicate, impress, accelerate and deliver.

### *Prepare*

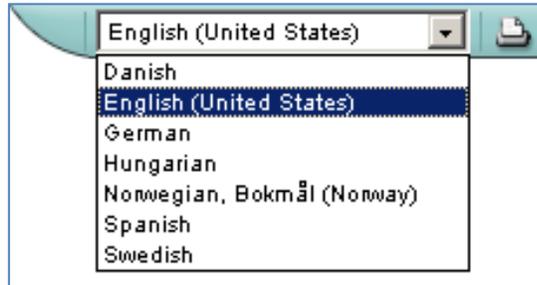
The first thing you'll have to do is think about your business as a whole and prepare for success. Do you have enough people on staff to handle an increase in projects? Do your current employees have the skills necessary to scale the size of the applications you take on? Make sure that you have all the human capital needed to handle the increase in workload that

application generation can create.

### Define Your Market

Who are your ideal customers? Software consulting is not a geographically-bound industry, so don't turn business away based on location. Think locally, but act globally.

Localization and multi-lingual support helps expand your reach into new countries.



### Identify Your Strengths

How can you advertise your strengths if you don't know what they are? Assess your team and inform prospects of your expertise, whether it's shrink-wrap consumer software or Help Desk applications. Everyone wants to do business with an expert.

### Choose Your Niche

What are you going to specialize in? Is there a particular type or application you build exceptionally well, do you focus on speed and quality or can you take any application to the next level. Whatever your niche, this determines what types of customers will gravitate towards you.

### Differentiate From Competitors

Why should a prospective customer choose you for their current project, or stay with you for their next project? Application generation allows you to build more quickly and tailor the pricing to what the customer needs:

- Fixed Price, if the requirements are strong
- Time and Materials, if the project has a tight time schedule
- Project Based, a fixed monthly price for Full-Time Equivalent resources if a dedicated resource is desired

### Invest

To be a successful software consultant, you must invest time, energy and resources to ensure that you have developed a winning team. Get the right employees on staff and give them everything they need to be successful.

### Prime for growth

Using application generation as a pitch tactic can and will get you more business, so it's best to plan big. Expand on the expertise you have and invest in talented people. The job market is extremely rough right now, which means that there are many skilled individuals seeking employment. It's best to strike while the iron is hot.

Here is the best way to structure your team profitably:

- Database design, data modeling – senior developer
- Page layout – non-developer, graphic artist (no HTML or coding)
- Business logic – junior or mid-level developer

43 different page styles can make your application look better than ever.



The infrastructure of your business is paramount to success. Start by getting an Iron Speed Designer license for each developer on your team, which becomes very cost-effective with multi-seat pricing. Have temps or interns on staff for a limited time? Subscription licenses let you decide how many licenses you need on a month-by-month basis.

Another easy way to deliver for your clients is to choose a hosting solution for your generated applications:

- Rackspace: slightly more expensive, but they handle the machines with their equipment so you don't have to
- Amazon EC2: less expensive, and they give you a virtual machine instance to handle your machine and application

### Train your team

There is always more to learn whether it's in regards to your team or yourself. [Training](#) is essential for new hires to get up to speed and start developing quickly. Time is of the essence because the busier they become, less time there is for training. Once they are trained, you can easily move people between projects to get the maximum benefit from them. Iron Speed provides a plethora of training opportunities for its customers. Get your team the licenses they need and sign them up for class.

Iron Speed provides several training courses to all licensed Iron Speed Designer users.

The screenshot shows the Iron Speed Designer Training Courses webpage. The header includes the Iron Speed logo and navigation links for 'Buy', 'My Account', and a search bar. The left sidebar contains a navigation menu with the following sections:

- Basics**
  - Overview
  - Video Demos
  - Pricing & Ordering
  - Sample Applications
  - Easy Code Customization
  - Customers
  - Free Training
  - Download Now!
- Product Tour**
  - Product Tour
  - Web Applications
  - Mobile Applications
  - SharePoint Applications
  - Charts and Reports
  - Security
  - Team Development
  - What's New in V10.0
- Technical Materials**
  - Training Courses
  - Online Help
  - Technical Forums
  - White Papers
  - One Day Web Apps E-book
  - System Requirements
  - Product Roadmap
  - Version History

The main content area is titled "Iron Speed Designer Training Courses" and includes the following text:

Ramp up fast with free online training. Our courses are live and interactive, so you'll have plenty of opportunities to ask questions.

**DESIGNER 101: Getting Started with Iron Speed Designer**  
 This entry-level course makes you productive fast! It covers the basics of creating, customizing, and deploying applications. Held most Fridays. [More...](#) (FREE to all!)

**DESIGNER 201: Intermediate Iron Speed Designer**  
 This three hour, online course taught by Iron Speed MVPs explores intermediate topics. [More...](#)

**DESIGNER 301: Using Custom Stored Procedures**  
 Using Custom Stored Procedures explains how to use your custom stored procedures in generated applications. [More...](#)

**Reduce costs**

There are several things you can do to reduce costs. Try to use variable costs whenever and wherever possible. This will allow you to effectively scale an increase in costs with increases in business. You can also outsource non-expert tasks, however make sure to perform due diligence and ensure that the contractor is up to snuff with the rest of your team.

Consider using evaluation versions of software such as SQL 2008 R2 Express or Visual Studio 2010 Ultimate Trial. This will allow you to mitigate costs while still taking advantage of the products.

Take advantage of Iron Speed Designer subscription licensing. This will give you more development bandwidth when you need it and provides automatic future-proofing for your customers.

**Communicate**

You can't know what your customers want if you don't communicate with them. Find out exactly what they're looking for and get to know them. Demonstrate your value and set expectations early in negotiations and you can win a greater share of business.

Evaluate every communication opportunity and always follow up. Try to stay professional and make sure that all communication provides value to

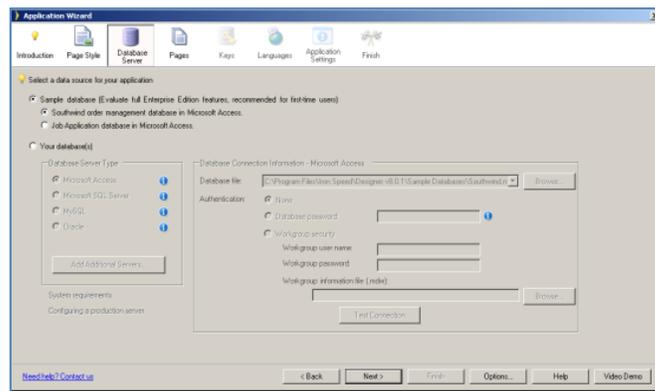
the customer. If you promise an update on a certain date, deliver one on that date – even if it’s just to tell them that you don’t yet have an update. This makes the client feel like they haven’t been forgotten and portrays a ‘small agency’ image.

Since larger contracts are tough to find right now, you should never turn one away. C-level decision-makers sometimes mask their identity by inquiring from a free email service, such as Gmail, instead of their corporate address. Treat everyone like they are a star and you’re more likely to get their business.

**Impress**

You only get one chance to make a first impression, so make it count. Come in with your prototype and let their imaginations run wild. Prospective clients will have varying levels of familiarity with the work you’ve done in the past. Since you have already done the hard work on these past projects, use this chance to show them off!

Use the powerful Application Wizard to build your prototype early in the negotiation process.



Anyone can tell a client what they want to hear, but not everyone will actually listen to what they have to say. Address their concerns and adjust your plan accordingly. Learn how they like to do business and you’re more likely to get commissioned for future projects.

Never assume to know what the customer wants. Don’t be afraid to ask questions if you aren’t sure about something. Because Iron Speed Designer can build an application very quickly, it’s important to understand the precise requirements at the beginning of the project.

Worried about disintermediation with your application generation tool? There are two ways to handle it:

- When dealing with a smaller client, you don’t have to disclose your techniques. All they want is the application to be done and done right.
- When dealing with a larger client, be upfront about intentions and tools used to complete the project. The tool handles all the boring stuff like pagination and framework, now it’s the consultant’s job to add the custom business processes. Customers generally see the value in having an expert tailor the application to their exact needs.

### ***Accelerate***

Rapid application development, or RAD, is supposed to be fast – it's your job to make sure it is. Lean on your application generation tool to do most of the heavy lifting so you can focus on the specific business processes. Rely on the robustness of the generated code to reduce testing requirements while focusing efforts on testing the customized code.

### ***Prototype, don't document***

Iron Speed Designer, or any application generation tool, can help you build an application faster than you can write about it. This means you no longer have to write detailed specification documents. Your customer is likely to evaluate a few screens of your prototype much more thoroughly than a 60 page spec to tell you what's missing. From there, it's easy to turn the prototype into the delivered application.

### ***Don't reinvent the wheel***

Chances are any customization issue you encounter has been noticed by another developer in the past. Check the [Iron Speed technical forums](#) to see if someone has come across the same issue. You might find something close, which you can then customize for your own benefit.

### ***Deliver***

Remember to keep releases well defined so that the customer always understands what is being given to them. The client is rarely as technically savvy as the consultant, so make sure that there is no question about exactly what it is you're delivering. Also, you should only deliver releases that have a demonstrable business benefit – don't bother the client with the small stuff.

Software is never perfect, but with application generation, the issue is invariably with the customization, not the generated code. Implement quality control on all custom code to create a 'checks and balances' system and enable issue identification and resolution.

Be prepared to work harder than you ever thought possible. Application generation can help you be very busy, so prepare yourself for it.

### ***Contact Iron Speed***

Email: sales@ironspeed.com

Telephone: 1-408-228-3400

Web: <http://www.ironspeed.com>

Iron Speed, Inc.  
2870 Zanker Road, Suite 210  
San Jose, CA 95134

Please send comments, suggestions and ideas regarding this white paper to [iseditor@ironspeed.com](mailto:iseditor@ironspeed.com)