Critical issues
- High cost and poor performance of existing limited GUI
- Extensive user training required to navigate LMS & SWS significantly increased implementation costs
- Return to green screen would result in lost sales revenue

Solution
- Create a new integrated graphical interface with enhanced functionality
- Rejuvenate existing apps and provide seamless integration between Agilysys' custom solutions and common desktop apps
- Provide an 'out-of-the-box' experience with the flexibility to meet the requirements of a diverse customer group

Results
- Reductions in customer attrition and significant increases to productivity
- Significant time and cost savings through the reuse of existing legacy code
- Consistent, professional graphical UI has added a 'wow' factor to sales presentations

Background
Agilysys offers comprehensive software solutions to a variety of markets, including hotels, resorts, casinos, cruise lines, restaurants, sports and entertainment venues and managed foodservice providers. The company operates out of its United States headquarters as well as regional offices in the United Kingdom, Hong Kong and Singapore.

Agilysys software solutions, some of which run on the IBM Series i platform and others on a Windows platform, facilitate property management, point-of-sale, inventory & procurement, business intelligence, activities management, self-service and document management. The company also assists customers in building systems infrastructure that increases profitability and productivity.

Two of the company's leading solutions are the Agilysys Lodging Management System® property management solution and the Agilysys Stratton Warren System inventory & procurement solution.

The Agilysys Lodging Management System (LMS) is recognized as one of the hospitality industry's premier property management software solutions. It automates every aspect of hotel operations — from reservations and credit card processing to accounting and housekeeping. LMS runs 24/7 and links customer gaming accounts to hotel accounts for evaluating comp decisions. Its versatile foundation easily expands to incorporate additional modules for activities scheduling, attraction ticketing, food & beverage, online reservations, remote check-in, sales & catering, spa management and more. The latest version of LMS features a modernized graphical user interface; a guest viewer that provides 'at-a-glance' insight into activities schedules and reservations; and Guest Hub, a central repository for maintaining guest profiles.

The Agilysys Stratton Warren System (SWS) is the hospitality industry's leading inventory & procurement software solution. SWS manages the entire procurement process via e-commerce, from the point of business development to daily operations, and integrates with all leading financial and point-of-sale software products. The system's reliability and capacity for handling high-volume activities, along with the incorporation of a full-function accounting backbone in an enterprise-wide paperless environment, sets the SWS solution apart from the competition. The SWS solution is designed to improve productivity and cash flow while reducing labor costs and waste.

With functionality specifically designed for the hospitality industry, Agilysys has achieved unprecedented success and is recognized as a leader in technology solutions for the industry. Thousands of customers throughout the United States, Canada, Europe, Asia, South America and Australia use Agilysys software systems.
The company’s customer base includes some of the most prestigious properties and entertainment groups in the world, including:
- Ameristar Casinos
- Boyd Gaming Corporation
- Cannery Casino Resorts
- Hotel del Coronado
- Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group
- Penn National Gaming
- Pinehurst Resort
- Royal Caribbean International
- The Breakers Palm Beach
- The O2 Arena
- Treasure Island
- Twickenham Stadium

Challenge
Agilysys was experiencing performance issues with its previous interface package. It was also becoming increasingly expensive to provide a very limited interface to customers. However, the immediate alternative of a return to the green-screen environment was unthinkable. The perception that the systems were outdated, coupled with the difficulty in training new employees on 5250-based green-screen applications, would likely result in prospects as well as existing customers opting for functionally inferior competitive products. The ensuing loss of revenue would be substantial.

In addition to the need for a new interface, Agilysys wanted to integrate LMS and SWS with the range of desktop applications commonly used in customer venues as well as with ERPs and other third-party software. It was also becoming increasingly necessary to work within a component-based architecture and to offer cross-platform integration in order to expand the company’s target market.

Agilysys had many years’ worth of development effort tied up in legacy code, and although the interface was a significant issue, rewriting the applications was not a viable option, as it would be too costly and time-consuming. The company needed to find a way to reuse the functionality of its legacy code, while presenting it in a flexible and dynamic format.

Solution
Agilysys selected looksoftware’s newlook tool to create the new interface that would rejuvenate LMS and SWS. newlook enabled the applications to be integrated with Excel and automate the reporting process through this integration. In addition, looksoftware’s soarchitect was used to provide interaction with the Agilysys DataMagine™ document management system, the company’s internally developed imaging tool, via web services. soarchitect was also the foundation for the composite application, LMS Guest Hub.

“We selected newlook and soarchitect primarily because of their ease of use and because the dynamic architecture was the best we had seen.” said Tina Stehle, senior vice president and chief operating officer of Agilysys. "This, coupled with enhanced functionality, integration capabilities and good ‘out-of-the-box’ experience, made looksoftware a great package.”

Agilysys initially participated in training at looksoftware’s annual conference before running a more in-depth course at its own offices. The company’s view of the training requirement for newlook was positive. “Three to five days of training on the product is sufficient to gain a solid understanding, with the supporting videos proving to be an invaluable reference tool” said Stehle.

Following initial training, the Agilysys development team began work to modernize the applications.
With 3,000 non-CUA-compliant screens, 99 percent of which had overrides, LMS was a significantly larger project than SWS. However, the modernized application, complete with Excel integration, PDF creation and attachment capabilities, was completed within six months. SWS, with 1,400 screens was completed in less than half that time and included a heavily customized web client, an automated distribution mechanism and automated exporting of all grids to Excel. The idea was that SWS should require no further customization after deployment, and so some JavaScript-based functional additions ensured that the 'out-of-the-box' experience was flexible enough to meet the requirements of a diverse customer group.

Agilysys worked closely with looksoftware's professional services team during the initial development phase and found the support to be responsive and effective. "During the course of the project, we ran into several challenges, and looksoftware always helped find the right solution" said Stehle. "They consistently responded with an answer within 24 hours, and if the required functionality wasn't available, they provided a work-around with examples, where possible."

Benefits
Agilysys has realized a number of benefits since releasing its modernized solutions. The company has achieved reductions in customer attrition, and customers have reported significant increases in productivity due to the integration with desktop applications.

"We now have the modern interface our business users expect, coupled with the renowned reliability of the IBM i server" said Stehle. "Adding the ability to export to Excel with one click has also been a major benefit. There is now a consistent professional user interface that provides seamless integration with the Microsoft Windows desktop."

However, as is the case with many such projects, it is the less tangible benefits that have really excited the organization; in particular, the sales team. The modernized solutions have added a 'wow factor' to sales presentations and have successfully countered the claim that the IBM iSeries is outdated. Customers are also excited about the increased functionality delivered by the updated applications. "The graphical interface is more productive and will help drive sales" commented Stehle. "Now, our functionally superior products can compete on a level playing field."

"looksoftware's tools have enabled us to create a new user interface on top of existing proven applications without extensively changing the original code. We have been able to build in new functionality that simply isn't possible in the green-screen environment. The flexible support of newlook's macros, which includes the ability to code in either VBscript or JavaScript, has allowed us to extend our core applications in very practical and exciting ways."

The deployed application, hosted on a Microsoft IIS Web Server, gives users the impression that they are working with an Internet application and not the IBM iSeries. Deployment after Agilysys wrote its own code was relatively simple; and depending on the original 5250 display file coding, the rendering of the screens can work more or less straight out of the box.

"With the new user interface, our sales team can compete with other vendors and bring a lot of excitement to the demo" Stehle concluded. "We can compete with native Windows-based applications, and new enhancements are developed relatively quickly without changing our native IBM i application. looksoftware is enhancing the product based on our input regarding new functionality. This proves that they truly listen to customers, and it is one of the reasons we are pleased to partner with them."