



Automotive Entrepreneur Travels Successful Road with Synergy

A successful automotive dealer and business executive in his native Australia, Jeff Gill “retired” at age 50 after a long career and some big wins. His retirement lasted about 20 minutes, long enough for his wife to tell him to take his boundless energy and new business idea out of the house.

Jeff was way ahead of her.

Armed with some skills in programming and inspired by the lack of good dealer management system software from his auto dealership days, Jeff founded Gateway DMS in 2000.

Now, Gateway DMS is a thriving business that provides integrated operations software for dealers of pretty much everything on terrestrial, motive-powered wheels. This includes cars, motorcycles, trucks, boats, caravans (trailers/recreational vehicles), and most recently, agricultural equipment.

The company is based in Loganholme, Queensland, south of Brisbane near Australia’s breathtaking Gold Coast. From large, multi-location dealerships with near-billion-dollar turnovers (annual sales) to small mom and pops, Gateway has consistently added new clients over the years. Clients have appreciated and stayed with the company even as newer, younger competitors have sprung up. And there are many: 2024 research reveals more than 65 DMS providers in Australia.¹



When I sold my dealership back in 2000, I was too young to retire and always wanted to build the perfect dealer management system.

Jeff Gill, Owner



¹ Source: [Slashdot.org](https://www.slashdot.org), 2024.

Today, the Synergy-based Gateway DMS software application, Voyager, shines through. It manages all dealer operations: administration (accounting, payroll, CRM, billing), unit tracking, showroom, service, parts sales and inventory, and general management, including analytics. Its Navigator app provides remote and mobile access to Voyager functions. Gateway's loyal customers benefit from the company's unwavering commitment to delivering a high-functioning system with a highly personalized customer experience.

A Venerable Application's Long and Winding Road

Self-taught in programming—he got bitten by the bug when joining a friend in his COBOL class—Jeff was seemingly a natural at it. What eventually became the Voyager software was adapted from a real estate application that he and his current CTO, Gary Wegner, wrote in the mid-1980s for a neighbor, (wisely) retaining the rights to use it outside the real estate industry.

After selling that business to purchase his own dealership, Jeff continued to expand his programming skills by extending MIDAS, the commercial DMS he used at his dealership, using SoftVelocity's Clarion RAD product. Written in Synergex's DBL language, MIDAS was based on MCBA, a set of software packages for accounting, distribution, and manufacturing that could be easily customized for different businesses. He liked the fact MIDAS was reliable and fast.

After he sold his dealership and decided to create his dream DMS application, Jeff called Synergex to get a DBL license. He started by converting the real estate application to DBL (from ODBS, O'Hanlon Database Solution, based in Oregon), then integrating his hands-on development experience and dealership knowledge to create a power application. He moved his application forward, shifting and adding technologies as needed to grow his business, with the self-sufficient attitude that if Gateway couldn't find the tools or tech they needed, they'd create it themselves.

A Powerful Partner: Synergy

Gateway DMS started in September 2000 and went live in May 2001. With the full-blown Dealership package using Jeff's years of dealership experience, the company was able to move fast. Gateway briefly considered using Progress instead of DBL but went with the latter for its greater flexibility (it really paid off, Jeff says). Business was booming right out of the gate, with so many dealers knowing Jeff from his role on the Toyota Dealer Committee for IT.

The dev team started out with a "good old character-based system," running on SCO UNIX (and later Linux) and using a French Telnet client. In 2005, the Telnet vendor quadrupled its licensing fees. Jeff sought out a better option, which happened to be written in the [Delphi](#) programming language, and a long, satisfying technical relationship was born.

By 2009, however, Gateway DMS faced a challenge. Many competitors were heading off into Windows, although encountering slow, cumbersome services.

Jeff's response: How can we provide a Windows UI but keep our fast performance advantage?

With 80% of Gateway DMS users working at point of sale (including in parts, service, and showroom), providing a Windows UI without slowing down their work became a priority. The application's character user interface (CUI) was already mouse-aware and had tabs, hot keys, and other productivity-enhancing features. They needed to get these important features to Windows.

In 2010, Gateway looked at UI options and went with [DevExpress](#), a third-party component suite for Delphi and other platforms that enables developers to create desktop and web applications. Rich features include signature data grids and Tree List controls, toolbars, menus, and sidebars.

“We’re very fortunate that we chose Synergex’s DBL language and toolset when we started our business many years ago. The flexibility, reliability, and speed it’s provided has given us a real edge. Having a blindingly fast back end that can talk to any other front end has enabled us to bring our Voyager application forward and stay consistently competitive.”

Jeff Gill, Owner



Jeff, Gary, and their team chased the early UI challenge from Windows by experimenting with CUI screen sizing to create the foundation for the new UI, then slowly moved their key UI features to Windows components. They added menus first, followed by all their grids and eventually their complex forms.

By taking this carefully staged approach to its Windows UI, the development team was able to preserve performance. The end result: a very thin Windows client, made up of DevExpress controls and Delphi code, with all the business logic in the Synergy back end. The 2010 CUI and today's UX perform exactly the same, a credit to Linux, ISAM, and adding the UX in stages. Linux has provided security and performance, with SSH for client/server delivering lean and fast performance.

One of the paradigms underneath Voyager's UI: since the beginning, everything has been template-driven by Synergy DBL code, right down to very complicated forms. With a strong code base, providing a modern UX for its budget-conscious, simplicity-demanding customers hasn't been a problem for the company over the years. Today, the developer team does everything inside DBL. With the ease of compiling, building, and getting out code, the team can do things very quickly in a structured manner.

Synergy products that have helped Gateway DMS be successful include Synergy ISAM, which has helped maintain performance and includes the ability to update ISAM files on the fly; SQL API (SQL Connection), used with MySQL for data replication and high-level reporting and extensive business analytics; ReportWriter for ad hoc reporting; and Synergy classes and objects, which improved the structure and performance of their growing, monolithic programs.

Other tools that Gateway uses include

- Blazor, an open-source web framework for creating web apps
- FireMonkey, another Delphi framework for creating cross-platform apps that run on Windows, Linux, Android, and macOS
- DevExpress themes (used to differentiate branches using color, for example).

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Jeff and his team have created one of the best dealer management systems in the marketplace and have fought some challenging market headwinds to get there.

**William Mooney,
President & CEO**

 **SYNERGEX**



From CUI to GUI—and Beyond

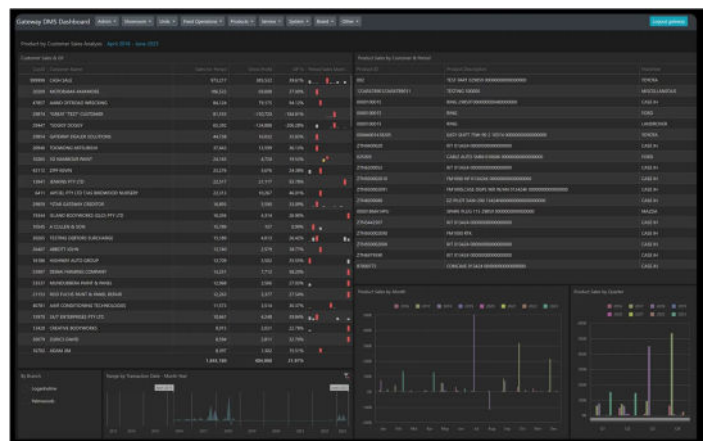
By philosophically and mechanically separating the front end of his Synergy application from the back-end business logic (bolstered with third-party componentry from DevExpress), Jeff was able to deliver a competitive (Windows) GUI while preserving the value of Linux.

All while providing a fast, modern customer experience. For example: Android and iOS devices can talk to the Synergy back end on the Linux server. The DMS platform can also easily accommodate individual customer needs: for instance, supporting nine Telnet sessions at a time for customers that want to monitor different branches. Next up? Using AI (ChatGPT) for improving customer help functions.

In his development philosophy, Jeff has generally eschewed packaged software over best-in-function components. The development team has engineered for life, modernized thoughtfully, and adopted trendy new technologies carefully (or not at all) in building and maintaining Voyager. All in the service of making their customers' businesses ever stronger, their lives simpler, their technology non-invasive, and always respectful of their budgets and operational quirks. The company started its business doing monthly releases, and now new software is tested and released weekly.

Jeff's mantra: *What does the customer need? How do we best Just Make It Work?*

Continuity has been helped and preserved by having the same programming leads for 23 years ("When have you ever heard *that*?" Jeff commented). Today, Jeff oversees development with a team of just four programmers.



Renegade to the End: A Secret to Success

Over the years, Jeff's "inside-my-head" view of dealership operations has helped with Gateway's success. As a former DMS customer himself, he understands what customers want and has created the nimbleness needed. He has a great rapport with his customers, can speak their language, and brings a unique perspective to the operation. He and Gary have been fiercely committed to having an efficient development environment, even if it meant creating it from scratch, an unconventional approach.

Today, Gateway DMS's home-grown, customized development platform enables its developers to produce very quickly, using templates, macros, and grids that they've developed over the years. Visual Studio might have been a natural choice, but it wasn't available for Synergy development when Jeff needed to add power to his development process. So, he did what he's always done: pushed forward on his own to create the tools his team needed to be successful.

Their dev team remains lean and quick just like their application. They can develop rapidly. For example: in creating a new API for Ford in a competitive situation, the development team was able to produce it in six weeks, versus the 14 months estimated by a larger competitor. When Gateway recently hired a couple of new, younger programmers, they were able to get up to speed on their platform and Synergy DBL very quickly.

A Powerful Partnership

Even though—or perhaps because—Gateway DMS built its own commercial-quality development platform, Jeff has been very active in the Synergex Community. He was a regular at the Synergex annual conferences, where he shared his challenges, achievements, frustrations, and ideas with everyone. In fact, his “table” was a frequent stop for other developers and Synergex Professional Services consultants, who marvel at some of the creative things he and his team have done with their thriving 23-year-old Synergy application—like how fast they can spin up new UI components.

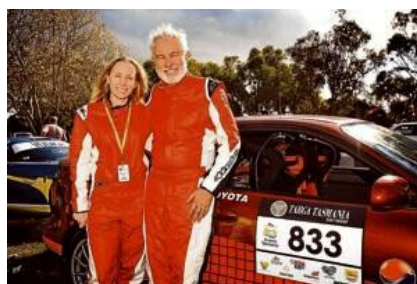


“Jeff and his team have created one of the best dealer management systems in the marketplace and have fought some challenging market headwinds to get there,” says Synergex CEO Bill Mooney. “Over the years, we’ve watched him build a beautiful home on top of an incredibly solid foundation. A lot of that was out of necessity, but he’s been able to accomplish that in his own special way. We’ve learned a lot from Jeff over the years. He’s been a great partner for Synergex.”

Gateway DMS is one of many independent Synergy trailblazers that have built an application and profitable business on top of the Synergy toolset. Jeff and his team were able to chart their own technology course to help both their customers and their business achieve success. With Synergy in place from Day One, their unique business logic has not only survived but also thrived—and will take Voyager and Gateway DMS far into the future.

In Jeff’s spare time, you can find him preparing for and participating in [TARGA Tasmania](#), the annual 2000-kilometer car race that takes drivers through “some of the world’s ultimate driving roads in one of the world’s greatest wilderness locations.”

As if winning the daily race to help his customers be successful wasn’t enough.



Jeff Gill and daughter Melanie racing with their 1990 Toyota Celica GT-Four.

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1.916.635.7300 | synergy@synergex.com | www.synergex.com