

Weidmüller saves with LANSA Commerce Edition for JD Edwards



The Weidmüller Group is a leading provider of solutions for the transmission of power, signals and data in industrial environments with production facilities, sales companies and agencies in over 70 countries. Weidmüller in North America, based in Richmond, Virginia, USA, has over 750 distributors and direct customers. Weidmüller replaced an inflexible ebusiness solution for its JD Edwards World ERP with LANSA Commerce Edition to lift online orders from under 30 to over 50 percent.

Selena Garner, customer service manager at Weidmüller, says, "Our company is expanding rapidly and sales have increased greatly over the last two years. Even so, the sites have freed up at least eight hours of labor each day. LANSA Commerce Edition is highly flexible and any requirement we dream up can be added."

Slow Uptake for Online Ordering

Weidmüller's customers in America and Canada consist of several hundred distributors, mainly electronics suppliers and OEM partners, with a smaller number of direct customers in the railway, shipbuilding, electrical equipment, process and machinery industries.

Weidmüller had offered distributors Web access for online ordering and shipment tracking for a number of years, but the uptake was disappointing.

"We want to receive at least 60 percent of distributor orders electronically, but we were achieving less than 30 percent," explains Garner. "Our distributors did not like the old Web site at all as the navigation was cumbersome and it lacked functionality."

Many distributors still placed orders by fax, phone and email which caused problems, including distributors quoting incorrect prices on their purchase orders, or not realizing an item was on backorder. Garner's team then needed to contact the distributor to rectify the error, which delayed delivery and put a strain on the relationship, especially when a distributor had committed on a price and delivery date to their customer. Weidmüller's call center also received many inquiry calls that could easily have been handled online.

"The last thing you want is a customer service person on the phone reading off tracker numbers or stock levels," says Garner. "To increase the online usage by our distributors we needed a far more friendly and functionally rich B2B site."

Weidmüller had given up trying to improve their existing packaged B2B Web site, as the vendor had become less responsive to their requirements. The architecture of the site was also a problem as the solution required the installation of Java applets on a Windows server, while accessing the System i data.

Implementing updates always required two developers, one with strong HTML skills and one with JD Edwards and System i skills.

When the Java version of the applets started falling behind, hindering the upgrade to a newer Windows server, Weidmüller decided to look for a better solution urgently.

"One of the reasons we chose LANSA was their good understanding of JD Edwards," states **Kevin Rackley**, systems analyst at Weidmüller. "LANSA Commerce Edition would also run on the same server as our ERP and was easy to customize and expand, putting us in control."

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A Rapidly Implemented Solution

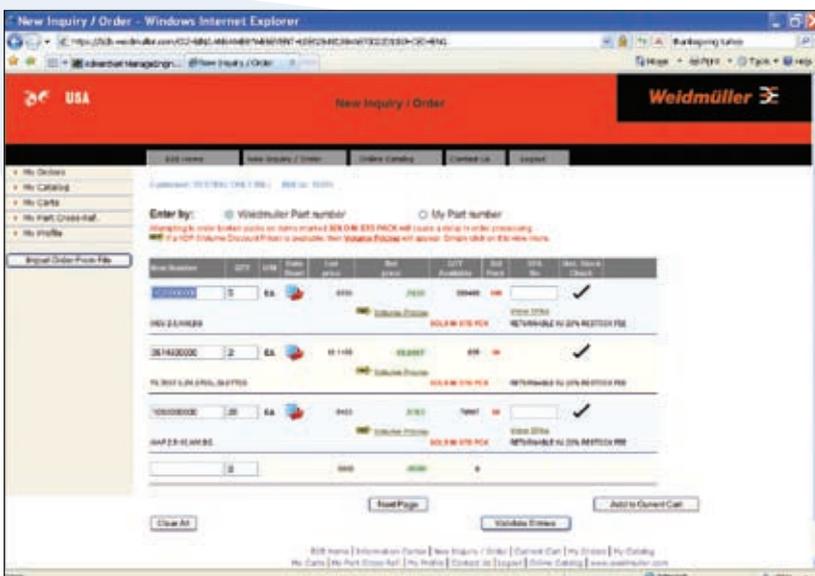
With the assistance of a LANSA consultant, Rackley built and implemented Weidmüller's first B2B solution, a site for its American distributors, in less than two months.

"In fact, getting the site up and running took one month," explains Rackley. "But once the site was available, everyone got really involved and changed their idea about how the site should look and behave. So we had another month of customization."

"We first rolled out the site to the guys that complained the most about the old system," laughs Garner. "They told us about their favorite Web sites and their least favorite sites and what features work best for them."

For example, distributors often know the part numbers they want and don't always want to shop around or browse the online catalog.

They can now key in all the items they need, even using partial item numbers, and the system validates the entire order and shows the descriptions, prices and availability for all line items simultaneously. Distributors and customers can also create custom catalogs of frequently ordered parts that give a quick overview of what is in stock. →



Weidmüller's new site lets distributors key in orders using partial item numbers. The system will validate the entire order and display descriptions, prices, availability and delivery dates.

They can also place orders by uploading an Excel file with part numbers and quantities to the B2B site.

Rackley next implemented a site for Weidmüller's Canadian distributors. The Canada operation runs from the same server, but uses a separate instance of JD Edwards.

"The Canadian site, with many customizations, was operational less than three weeks after we demonstrated the American site to them," says Rackley.

The third ecommerce site was for direct customers. Although similar in functionality, over time this site has become quite distinct.

"By creating separate Web site instances, each business division can make autonomous decisions, while we have the benefit of a single platform and single skill set company wide," says Rackley.

Rapid Uptake by Dealers

Less than two years after implementing the first B2B site, Weidmüller now receives nearly 50 percent of its orders electronically and is well on its way to achieving its target of 60 percent. Just as importantly, the volume of inquiry calls has also dropped dramatically.

One feature that has greatly boosted the uptake of online ordering by distributors is drop shipping of goods directly to customers.

"Rather than taking up valuable time from the customer service team, sales reps also use this feature to ship samples," says Garner.

"We get a lot of small orders in the afternoon, just before the 3:30 p.m. cutoff time for same day shipping. Previously my team had to scramble to key in those 'red orders' on time and customers would call to confirm they had made the deadline. Now orders flow straight to the warehouse and the customer gets immediate confirmation."

"Our company is rapidly expanding and sales have increased greatly over the last two years," continues Garner. "Even with increased business volumes the site has freed up at least eight hours labor each day, so my department can now take on more responsibilities."

"The sites have made it easier for our customers to do business with us. Not only easier than it was to deal with us in the past, but also easier than it is to deal with our competitors. The new sites have also helped bring in new customers."

"We get compliments all the time. On the rare occasions that our Internet service



Selena Garner, customer service manager and Kevin Rackley, systems analyst at Weidmüller North America.

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provider has problems, even if only briefly, we get phone calls immediately. That's a clear sign the site is constantly being used."

"We can offer our customers true 24x7 access. On Monday mornings the warehouse always has orders that were placed during the weekend. Customers also access the site after hours during the week, especially our customers on the West Coast."

"The site offers more features than we could ever offer over the phone and saves time and effort on both sides. It is hard to measure directly, but I am sure average order costs and delivery time have come down," says Garner.

Rackley adds, "Now we have a solution that is purely browser based and doesn't require a separate Windows server."

"With LANSA everything can be on the same System i box, a far easier to manage and more robust B2B environment than before. The System i never crashes, doesn't need rebooting and is very secure. Except for one planned upgrade, it has been up for two years."

Rapid Improvement Cycle

"LANSA Commerce Edition is highly flexible. Any requirement we dream up, can be added to the site," concludes Garner.

"At the beginning we tried to keep to the standard version, but once we realized how easy it was to make changes, there were no limitations. The more we asked for, the faster the changes came. It was something we had to get our mind around because the old system was so inflexible and nothing could be changed."

"With LANSA we can customize the Web solution with our own System i developers who also understand and maintain our JD Edwards ERP," continues Rackley.

"The LANSA Repository and 4GL are easy to learn. In the old days we always needed help from the vendor and two people to upgrade the system, one with PC skills and one with System i skills."

"Now one person with only general HTML knowledge can update the system. That is where we will continue to save money."

"Back in 2005, we needed something we could implement quickly and painlessly, and that's what we got with LANSA Commerce Edition," concludes Rackley. "But we are barely tapping what LANSA can do." ■

COMPANY AND SYSTEM INFORMATION

- Weidmüller is the leading provider of solutions for the transmission of power, signals and data in industrial environments. The company develops, produces and sells electromechanical connection technology, switching cabinet electronics and network infrastructure components. The Weidmüller Group has a strong international focus with its own manufacturing plants, sales companies and agencies in over 70 countries.
- Weidmüller in America is based in Richmond, Virginia, while the Canadian operation is based in Markham, Ontario. Both operations run separate instances of JD Edwards World 7.3 ERP on the same IBM System i model 520. For more information visit: www.weidmuller.com