

ViaTech Publishing offers customers total control



ViaTech Publishing Solutions, headquartered in New York, is the authority in on-demand destination printing. Through its facilities and partners in the U.S., Europe and Asia, customers can create content locally and print globally. The process of uploading print files, customizing them and ordering copies to be delivered anywhere in the world is entirely automated. ViaTech's core IT system, Web portal and systems integration are all based on LANSA technology. The solution is developed and maintained by a small team of analyst developers, from both ViaTech's own IT department and LANSA business partner ML Info Design.

Mike Palma, Director of IT, says, "We realize substantial processing efficiencies as ninety percent of our orders are received electronically. Nowadays, the IT services around the printing process are a major selling point. The systems we have developed with LANSA are sophisticated and play a major role in getting new customers."

Maintenance and Data Integrity

ViaTech's publishing services are based on a combination of advanced JIT (Just-In-Time) manufacturing concepts and emerging print-on-demand technologies, allowing customers to eliminate inventory costs and reduce shipping expenses.

"We store the document file and print it when the customer needs it," explains Palma. "That way the customer saves in costs associated with storing inventory and throwing away out-of-date materials. The other way we save customers money is by printing close to the end destination – this can save our customers hundreds of thousands of dollars in shipping costs."

ViaTech's on-demand business model

requires a flexible and robust IT system that can communicate instantly and 24 hours a day with its global customers. "The current system, developed with LANSA, does the job very well. Prior to LANSA we had an RPG legacy system that couldn't meet our requirements anymore."

"Our biggest problem was database integrity. Also, making a small change, such as adding a new field or creating a new file relationship, would take weeks," explains Palma, who came from a PC background and didn't think that database changes should be such a big deal. "I decided early on that we had to redevelop the whole RPG legacy system."

Palma, who after some research had already put LANSA on his short list of tools, then

discussed his requirements with LANSA business partner ML Info Design, who helped with further evaluations of LANSA. "I learned that LANSA's central data definition Repository ensures database integrity and practically removes the need for recompiling programs after a database change. The fact that LANSA offered not only development tools, but also integration tools was another big plus. So we made the decision to go with LANSA and reengineer the entire legacy system."

"Our IT systems play a major role in getting new customers on board."

Core, Web and BPI Solutions

The initial system development, from requirement analysis to implementation, took one and a half man years.

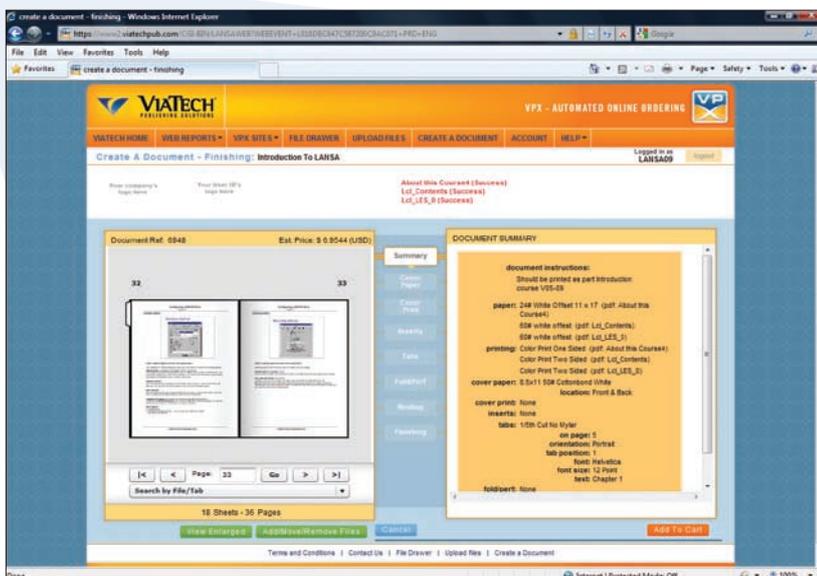
"We cut over during a weekend and we were running with a brand new system that included the entire business logic of order entry, billing, inventory, purchasing and financials. Considering the size of the project and the small development team, we delivered the system really fast. LANSA's framework development tool certainly turned out to be a great investment," reflects Palma.

Having a solid and well architected foundation in place, Palma then started looking at extending it to customers over the Web. "Web and eCommerce were still quite new and no one had any prior experience. Using LANSA's Web tools we started building our Web application from scratch. That project took just over a year and we delivered ViaTech Publishing Express (VPX), a very sophisticated Web solution, even by today's standards."

Using LANSA Integrator, customers can upload PDF files and once the files are on the server, thumbnail images are created. This allows customers to look at their documents online and flip through the pages.

Marc Leonard, Analyst Programmer and Director of ML Info Design, explains, "Some PDF files are set up with input fields, for example, to customize training course details. Using LANSA Integrator, the site allows customers to click on the PDF and input the fields."

Customers can combine multiple PDF files into a single document and re-sequence them



The thumbnail view of the document the customer is working on is continuously updated as they select options.

to build the content they want. Next they can select from various finishing options, such as paper quality and cover. They can insert blank pages and tabs and select from several folding and binding options. The price and the thumbnail view of the document the customer is working on are continuously updated as they select options.

After the customer has entered shipping instructions, LANSA Integrator queries the UPS Web site to find out the expected shipping fee. When the customer chooses to pay by credit card, LANSA Integrator connects to the credit card company to process the payment.

"We are using some other tools to create the thumbnail images and flip through them, but the rest is handled by LANSA," explains Leonard.

A growing number of ViaTech's customers have their own internal systems to manage print materials. For example, one of these customers, a global ERP vendor, has a sophisticated learning management system that they use to set up dozens of training classes each day all over the world.

Naturally these customers do not want to do any double data entry and repeat their course material orders on ViaTech's Web site. So Palma put a LANSA Integrator based solution in place that takes the XML order documents from the customer and parses them directly into the core IBM i system for printing and delivery.

A Major Selling Point

"We now receive around ninety percent of our orders electronically," explains Palma. "Taking orders electronically has allowed us to streamline the entire ordering process, ensuring that we are getting the correct information directly from the customer. Accuracy has improved tremendously. Plus we have been able to reduce overhead costs by eliminating most of the manual data entry. We have achieved substantial savings."

"All order methods are seamlessly integrated. Whether an order comes in via XML, our Web portal or whether it is entered by customer service staff, the orders all go into the same database, on the same box and flow through the same billing and inventory processes."

Palma notes that the IT services around the printing process are nowadays extremely important and a major selling point.



ViaTech is a complete resource for printed and collateral materials such as books, binders, index tabs, CD and DVD replication, media packaging, offset printing, posters and more.

"Without LANSA we could never have a team that small."

"Customers don't just ask about our printing capability. You need to be able to offer the complete technology solution, customized to individual needs."

"Customers want to know about our IT capabilities. They ask how they can get their orders to us. How they can look at their documents online and how we can integrate our system with theirs. Through LANSA we are able to provide all these services. The IT systems we have developed with LANSA are sophisticated and flexible, and play a major role in getting new customers on board."

"Using our IT systems, we can offer our customers total control over the coordination of their print materials. They can control the uploading, editing, printing and delivery from any location."

Small Team Handles all Projects

Palma plans to continue using LANSA to enhance existing systems and to deliver new functionality. Recent projects include a new lead management system and building XML/XSL-based browser applications using LANSA Web Application Module (WAM)

technology, which will allow the delivery of content in multiple formats from a single WAM component.

"A major benefit of LANSA and its Repository is the ease of making changes, whether it's adding a new field or modifying a screen. That is what first attracted us to LANSA and what we still see as its major benefit today," says Palma.

"The second benefit is the integrity of the data. Referential integrity and accuracy is something LANSA customers take for granted, but a lot of other organizations cannot claim the same. Last, but not least, I like the fact that LANSA keeps coming out with new and improved products, plus the fact that these new technologies integrate flawlessly with the existing core system."

Leonard concludes, "As a software consultant using LANSA I have been able to offer my clients Web site development, business process integration and development of core applications. Many different areas that one person could not possibly master if it would involve learning Java and other tools."

Palma agrees, "With a small development team and using a single LANSA skill set we can develop and maintain our core IT system, Web portal and system integration. Without LANSA we could never have a team that small. ■"

COMPANY AND SYSTEM INFORMATION

- ViaTech Publishing Solutions is a world leader in worldwide on-demand destination printing. ViaTech serves over 4,000 customers around the world in a variety of industries. ViaTech is a private corporation with over 400 employees, headquartered in Bay Shore, New York. For more information visit www.viatechpub.com
- ML Info Design is a LANSA partner in Haworth, New Jersey, with a proven track record of reengineering business systems across multiple industries. For more information visit www.mlinfo.com