

LANSA holds the key for STRATTEC



STRATTEC Security Corporation, headquartered in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in the U.S., is the world's largest producer of automotive locks, keys and related security access control products for global automotive manufacturers and the aftermarket. STRATTEC used a combination of LANSA's application development, modernization and BPI tools to dramatically improve the screen navigation of its System21 application and to replace repetitive tasks with automated EDI processes.

Nick D'Alessandro, Technical Lead at STRATTEC, says "We achieved major savings by tackling the most cumbersome procedures first. LANSA RAMP gave us the tools to truly solve the structural shortcomings of the legacy application, while LANSA Composer allowed us to set up efficient EDI and XML processes."

Improve and Streamline

STRATTEC has plants, engineering and distribution centers in Milwaukee, Detroit, El Paso and Juarez (Mexico) and operates manufacturing and support facilities in China, Japan and Korea through a joint venture. Formerly a division of Briggs & Stratton, STRATTEC's heritage goes back over 100 years, to the early days of the automobile.

Over the years, STRATTEC has customized its System21 ERP implementation considerably, especially the DRP (Distribution Requirements Planning) and MRP (Material Requirements Planning) modules. The company uses Nutech's warehouse management system and Future3 for EDI transacting with its production customers, the car manufacturers.

The integration of these solutions into System21 had its limitations and some of the

procedures within System21 itself were also inefficient. In addition, the order entry for aftermarket customers, such as car dealers and locksmiths, was still mostly manual. Even though these customers could send their orders electronically, EDI was only automated up to the point of STRATTEC's VAN (Value Added Network), from where data was retrieved manually.

STRATTEC wanted to improve and streamline its business processes, starting with the most cumbersome procedures first, without having to replace the underlying System21 application code.

After researching several products, STRATTEC selected RAMP from LANSA, a modernization product that includes LANSA's framework development tool, as well as facilities for screen consolidation and improved navigation for existing applications.

More recently, STRATTEC also implemented LANSA Composer for BPI (Business Process Integration) tasks, such as exchanging XML and EDI documents.

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"We wanted a solution that would allow us to preserve the business logic, while improving the business processes," says D'Alessandro. "We looked at several modernization tools, but most of them were just webify tools that make your application prettier, but not better. LANSA offered a solution that allowed us to truly deal with the structural shortcomings of our core system, improve the workflow and automate repetitive manual tasks. No one else could do that, unless it involved rewriting the underlying code."

Biggest Bang for the Buck

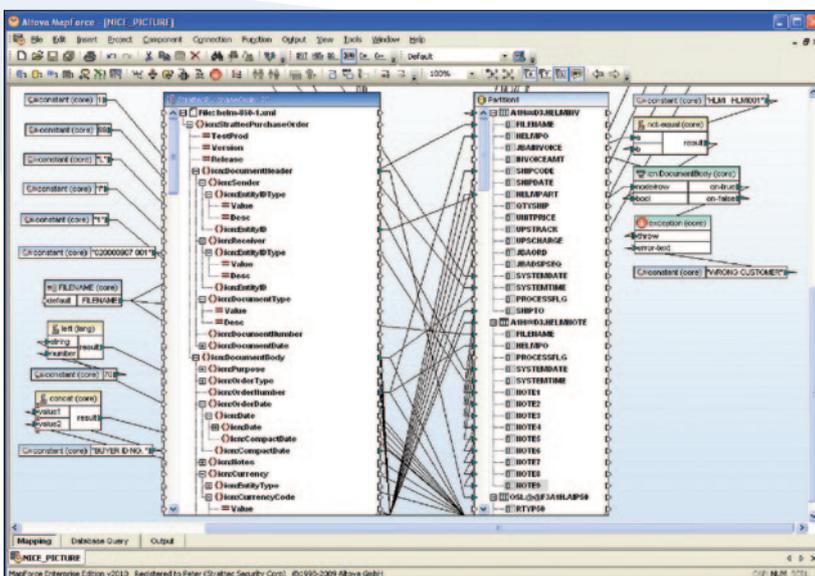
In choosing which projects to tackle first, STRATTEC uses a simple rule: start with what gives the biggest bang for your buck. In other words, start with the most inefficient procedure and turn it around.

One particularly time consuming procedure for STRATTEC's warehouse staff was determining which items in inventory transfers from their plants needed to be allocated to fill backorders and which items could be kept in stock.

The original 5250 application required many steps, including printing the list of received items, manually checking each item on the list to see if there was a backorder and then entering the quantity to be allocated. Staff had to switch between screens and menus frequently, start and exit several applications and write down customer numbers for pick slip sorting later in the process.

The new process, modernized and extended with Visual LANSA and RAMP, automatically checks all shipments for items on backorder and displays the relevant item receipts and backorders on a single screen. The user only has to confirm the stock allocation and the pick slips are automatically generated in the desired sequence.

"Users don't have to go through a dozen screens anymore to do their task. In the old



The process of mapping data items with LANSA Composer is graphical and intuitive. You don't have to care how the underlying code is created.

system a shipment took on average two and a half hours to process," says D'Alessandro. "Now a shipment takes on average 24 minutes to process. We didn't have to change the way the process works, we just streamlined it and made it six times faster."

Better Functionality plus EDI

Another very time consuming task was the entire procedure of retrieving the orders of aftermarket customers, shipping them and invoicing them.

Previously, every morning STRATTEC staff logged on to the Web site of its VAN, iConnect, to make screen prints of the orders that customers had sent by EDI. These printed orders were then manually entered into STRATTEC's System21 application for shipping and invoicing, a cumbersome process, as it required switching back and forth between multiple screens and manually entering shipping data.

At the end of the day, staff would again log on to iConnect's Web site, where the customer orders would still reside, and manually update each order with shipping information. iConnect would then send EDI ASNs (Advance Shipment Notifications) to the customers, based on these status updates.

In the new procedure, using LANSА Composer, the orders are automatically retrieved from iConnect in XML format, transformed and mapped to a System21 interface file for processing by the ERP system. Barcoded picking slips and shipping labels are produced, the goods are packed and the boxes come on line. Staff scan the order number and UPS tracking number, which results in a LANSА RAMP-based program populating a screen with shipping information. All the user has to do is confirm the information and an invoice will automatically be created in System21.

The LANSА process also sends electronic invoice information to iConnect, which iConnect converts to ANSI X12 810 invoices and transmits to the customer. LANSА Composer could do the actual end-to-end EDI transmissions, but for the time being STRATTEC prefers to continue using iConnect as its EDI VAN.

STRATTEC's first implementation of the new procedure was for HELM, a large wholesale aftermarket customer, who places between 60 to 100 orders each day for drop



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shipping to individual dealers and locksmiths.

Pete Chrostowski, Senior Business Process Analyst at STRATTEC who is responsible for delivering the EDI solution, says that the benefits of streamlining order procedures will be substantial. "We have been able to save staff over 25 hours per week, with just this first customer implementation. There are many more customers to follow and at some point LANSА Composer is going to be the heart of our order entry system."

Chrostowski also sees the potential to use LANSА Composer for streamlining procedures that have nothing to do with EDI. "LANSА Composer is good at automating repetitive processes of any kind," he says.

LANSА intended its Composer BPI tool to be used by business analysts rather than developers, and Chrostowski agrees that LANSА Composer doesn't require any coding skills. "Using LANSА Composer is quite intuitive. I can graphically see what it is going to do, but I don't have to care how the underlying code is created."

Even so, there was still a learning curve, as Chrostowski was new to XML and LANSА

Composer. Chrostowski feels that LANSА's Remote Mentoring facility was a big help during his first Composer project.

Prioritize Projects for ROI

Instead of setting out to modernize its entire legacy application, STRATTEC has carefully picked its projects. The company plans to modernize, or rather rationalize, key application problem areas first, by providing better functionality to business users and automating repetitive manual tasks.

"I know we can use RAMP to modernize our entire line-of-business system and at some point we will," says D'Alessandro. "But right now we have other priorities. We want to tackle our most inefficient procedures first and provide productivity gains for our users. Our primary focus is the distribution warehouse. Next we want to streamline our production customers and replace our Future3 EDI solution with LANSА Composer."

Regarding providing better productivity and modernizing STRATTEC's IT environment itself, D'Alessandro concludes, "We have delivered the new and improved functionality with our own small team, without having to hire EDI, XML or Java experts. LANSА integrates tightly with our RPG-based System21 system, while giving us the tools to do things that we could never have done with RPG." ■

COMPANY AND SYSTEM INFORMATION

- STRATTEC designs, develops, manufactures and markets automotive security products, including mechanical locks and keys, electronically enhanced locks and keys, steering column and instrument panel ignition lock housings; and access control products including latches, power sliding side door systems, power lift gate systems, power deck lid systems, door handles and related products.
- STRATTEC runs its LANSА modernized and extended System21 ERP (version 3.5.2) on an IBM iSeries model 520. The LANSА Composer BPI solution runs in a Microsoft Windows 2003 Server environment. For more information, please visit: www.strattec.com