LANSA | CASESTUDY

DURO-LAST DELIVERS WEB SOLUTION ACROSS DEVICE TYPES

SNAPSHOT

CUSTOMER
Duro-Last is the world's largest manufacturer of custom prefabricated thermoplastic single ply roofing systems.

CHALLENGE
Provide a solution that independent contractors can use from desktops and mobile devices.

SOLUTION
Use Visual LANSA to deliver a dynamic Single-Page web application (SPA) that is available to authorized users across all device types and browsers.

KEY BENEFITS
Quick delivery with small IT team. The entire solution, server-side and client-side across many device types, was delivered with one tool, one language and one set of code.

THE CHALLENGE

Duro-Last is the world's largest manufacturer of made-to order single-ply roofing systems and unique in its method of prefabricating the entire roofing system under ideal factory controlled conditions. Duro-Last's roofing systems are installed across the USA and Canada through 3,000 certified independent contractors. Duro-Last also has sales, engineering and technical staff, who are ready to assist the contractors.

Communication between Duro-Last and its contractors is by phone, fax and email through Duro-Last's customer services center, which is manned by 35 full time staff. Sue Gilbert, then Director of Information Services at Duro-Last, explains, "Our customer service representatives spend a lot of time on the phone, providing assistance with things that the contractor should be able to do online, such as placing of orders, tracking of shipments, managing invoices and more. Giving contractors online access to their data would save a lot of time, both for the contractor and for us."

Duro-Last's business model is unique, with its made-to-order products, technical support and incentive programs. Commercial off-the-shelf solutions were not suitable. So, Duro-Last went searching for a development platform that would allow its developers to provide contractors with a tailored solution.

Responsive web development was a top requirement, as the developed solution would need to be suitable for desktop access by office staff from the larger contractors, as well as for mobile access by the smaller contractors.

Secondly, the platform had to be productive, as Duro-Last's in-house team of two developers had to be able to develop and maintain the solution. One developer with .NET skills and one with legacy skills, both already busy with maintaining the ERP system. Another requirement was out-of-the-box browser compliance. Since Duro-Last has no control over what browsers contractors may want to use, it would be impossible to tweak the code for all possible variations.

"Customer service spends a lot of time answering questions about things that should be available online."

THE PROJECT

Visual LANSA was selected as it met Duro-Last's criteria for low-code productivity, responsive web development and cross-browser compliance. Plus, Visual LANSA could integrate tightly with Duro-Last's ERP system.

Gilbert and her team drafted the specifications for the web portal, which was delivered in just weeks by Duro-Last's own IT team, with assistance from LANSA professional services. It includes four key components:

'Account Details' allows contractors to view invoices, authorize payments, download statements and submit waiver of lien forms. 'Project Status' ties together all the tasks related to a roofing project, such as requesting technical assistance, placing orders, inquiry into shipping dates and booking the inspection of the finished roof. All tasks have a responsible person associated with it, providing workflow guidance to Duro-Last and the contractor. 'Program Standing' offers contractors access to Duro-Last's Incentive Program. The fourth component, 'My Profile', lets contractors maintain account details and setup the user-ids, passwords and access levels for their staff.

Although access to the solution's URL was sufficient from a technical point of view, Duro-Last preferred a downloadable app from a marketing

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Sue Gilbert
Information Systems Team Lead
Duro-Last

perspective. Therefore, it was decided to wrap the solution in the Visual LANSA container app. As an added benefit, the container allows Duro-Last to wrap the solution with device security (Stealth from Unisys).

Visual LANSA's server platform can be Windows, Cloud (AWS or Azure), Linux or IBM i. At Duro-Last, the solution runs on an IBM i server where it integrates with the Infor XA ERP system (previously MAPICS).

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THE BENEFITS

Gilbert said, "To me Visual LANSA is the cream of the crop, because it gave us the ability to create a responsive website and wrap it with security into a mobile app, while also giving office staff of larger contractors the ability to work with the same solution from their desktop. We can now give both our small and large contractors the solution they want. We can do all that with one tool, one language and one set of code."

"Getting quick results is also important. With LANSA, our developers became productive very quickly, because they didn't have to use a whole range of tools and languages. They can use the same productive low-code language for both the server side logic and the user interface," said Gilbert.

Dennis Schluckbier, developer at Duro-Last, has a Windows development background and is familiar with PHP, JavaScript and other web development languages. He personally enjoys the challenge of learning new programming languages, new features and 'getting into the code'. But he recognizes that not every developer shares that passion and that it is unreasonable to expect that employers are keen to pay for developers continuously pursuing that passion during work hours.

"Developers who are savvy enough, but don't have up-to-date web development skills, may be able to cut down web development time to less than half with LANSA, compared using the traditional mix of web development languages," estimates

Schluckbier. "Plus, the quality is likely to be better, because developing good web applications comes with experience and when the tool takes care of the low level coding, there is less opportunity to get it wrong, especially for novice developers."

"The web world changes very quickly and programming languages come out with new releases and new features all the time. Not everyone has the time or the passion to keep up with that. If LANSA can keep up with those web developments, then that is going to save all its customers heaps of time. It feels a little bit like giving over control to the tool, but so far LANSA has been able to handle everything I wanted it to do," says Schluckbier.

Gilbert received very positive feedback on the corporate app, with contractors commenting they find the solution easy to use both on their mobile and desktop.

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CONCLUSION

"The expectation is that the solution will reduce the number of calls to our call center significantly. However, a reduction in call center traffic was not our main driver. The most important goal is to improve the customer experience," says Gilbert.
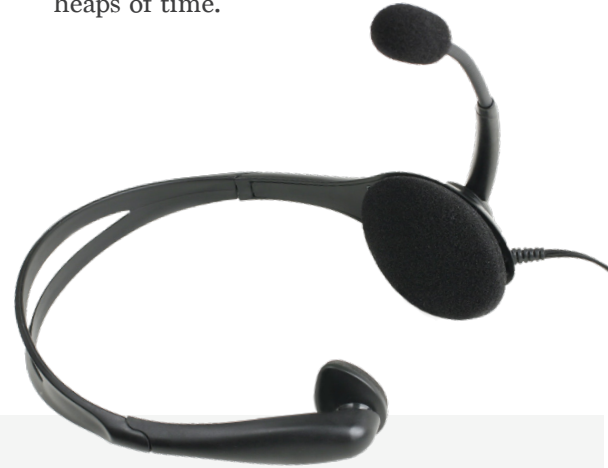
"Timing is extremely important in this industry. We can produce almost all made-to-measure orders within a few days and our standard shipment is on the fifth day. The contractor may have hired a crane and booked hotel rooms for his staff. Online order entry and online inquiry are crucial for avoiding scheduling conflicts and the expensive consequences they may have for our customers."

"This is our second project with LANSA and working with the LANSA company and consultants is awesome. Our guys have picked LANSA up quick and find it simple to use. And most important, we like the results," concludes Gilbert.

The web world changes very quickly. If Visual LANSA can keep up, then that is going to save its customers heaps of time.

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THE WORLD'S BEST ROOF®

ABOUT DURO-LAST

Duro-Last, Inc. is the world's largest manufacturer of custom prefabricated, thermoplastic single-ply roofing systems. Over two billion square feet of Duro-Last membrane has been installed throughout North America. Duro-Last is headquartered in Saginaw, MI with additional manufacturing facilities in Carrollton, TX Grants Pass, OR; Jackson, MO; and Sigourney, IA

For more information visit: http://duro-last.com/

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