LANSA Case Study

Strategic partnership based on mutual strengths lets LANSA partner thrive in niche market

Strategic Business Systems, a LANSA Business Partner in New Jersey, has been providing information systems solutions to the motor vehicle industry for over 15 years. Strategic customers include KTM Sport Motorcycles, BMW, Saab, Ducati, Land Rover, Hummer, Hino, KIA and many more prestigious names in the automotive, truck and motorcycle industries.

Strategic has recently extended its RPG based Dealer Communication System (DCS) to the Internet with LANSA for the Web. Over 260 KTM Sport Motorcycles dealers can now place orders for motorcycle parts and search the system for pricing information and inventory availability with a browser. Building on this success, Strategic is now planning to redevelop its core Motor Vehicle Systems modules with LANSA. LANSA's multilingual facilities and cross-platform capabilities will help Strategic to expand its share in the motor vehicle industry into international markets.

Internet based dealer communication is just a first step

Michael Herlihy, Motor Vehicle System Product Manager at Strategic, explains the challenges facing Strategic. "Our systems are native RPG with some client-server systems written in Visual Basic. We were looking for a product that could Web enable our AS/400 based Dealer Communication System. While there are a host of what we view as first wave products, when we looked at these products in depth we thought, if we are going to put out an Internet or Extranet solution to a large number of dealers, they were not good enough. We were not just looking for a quick Web interface, we were looking for a Web solution. That's what LANSA did for us, that is why we chose LANSA."

"We then examined the second wave of application development tools from many different angles. We looked at how functionally rich the product was, we looked at the learning curve and we looked for a strategy to make our product international. We were also looking for a business partner relationship. So we took our time."

"We stay away from generic systems, like ERP packages and accounting type level systems. There are already so many available. We have focused on vehicle distribution and warranty. The larger software houses cannot focus in this niche area, because you cannot sell a car distribution system to many companies. But we have established ourselves in this niche market with over 15 different companies and when you look closely that is a pretty

"Even those of us with little or no AS/400 experience are creating quality applications with LANSA."

good market share. However, since this is a relatively small market, the major challenge is to continue to grow and get new customers. This is one reason why we want to expand outside North America."

"In addition, we have customers in Spanish and French speaking regions," continues Michael. " While many automotive companies have a preference for an English language solution, or are even told to use English by their head office, their dealers may actually prefer another language. LANSA, with its multi-lingual facilities lets offer our solutions in several languages, while maintaining one set of source."

Phased Implementation of Internet Solutions

"Once we had selected LANSA, the development was rapid. For KTM, we set up the whole infrastructure, including the internal network to access the AS/400. Then we customized and implemented our Part Distribution System (PDS) for them and converted the existing data of their old Windows system to the AS/400. The next stage was to develop an Internet hookup to the Parts system with LANSA for the Web. The actual development took only 3 or 4 weeks, with only one developer on the project."

"To do this same project with RPG we would need to do much more to get a similar result. Firstly, we would have to build the AS/400 back-end functionality to support the system. Secondly, we would have to build the HTML front-end solution to gather the information. Also, we would have to build the CGI scripting as a kind of middle communication link. I don't think the solution itself could have been developed as fluently as it has been developed in LANSA. It would have probably taken a team of about 3 people, while the LANSA project was done by just one developer."

"LANSA has enabled us to consolidate our skill base and use one product to develop complete solutions. Initially we used LANSA for Web is to develop a Web extension of our host system. Next we are going to move into the core product itself and redevelop this with LANSA. Our strategy is to use LANSA to get both immediate benefits and then long term benefits."

Alan Seiden, a Strategic application developer with Visual Basic experience, comments. "We are using LANSA to convert many of our green-screen RPG programs to Web applications."

We feel confident knowing that a superb LANSA support team backs LANSA. LANSA's repository architecture means we can create components that we can reuse in current and future projects. We will continue to rely on LANSA's commitment to the AS/400 and proven technology."

Scaleable AS/400 Benefits

Michael explains "New entrants to the market are primary potential customer for our systems. The ability to start with a small end AS/400 helps us to provide a cost-effective solution to customers. KTM is a good example of a fast growing company that moved from an NT solution to the AS/400, to manage its business better. The AS/400 is scaleable and so is LANSA. As business grows, the solution will grow with them. Maybe KTM may need to upgrade a processor in the future, but the software will stay the same."

"The AS/400 also has extremely reliable performance, availability and security. Our reputation in the industry is very important to our success in the motor vehicle niche market. Being able to count on the AS/400 and LANSA

"To grow in the niche motor vehicle systems market we must go International. LANSA will help us to get there."

ensures that our system will continue to operate and perform for our customers."

"For one of our customers, the decision to use a AS/400 was a very difficult one. They had no experience with the platform and did not know what was required to operate such a server. After using the AS/400 for over a year, they are comfortable that the system 'runs itself'. They do not need to make large investments to support the system."

"This type of reliability confirms our recommendation for the AS/400 time and time again. Now we use the AS/400 as a Web server, e-mail server and application server. It meets all of our needs."

"While the majority of car distribution companies are using an AS/400, there is a trend towards NT. To know that you are not locked in an AS/400 solution is important and the fact that the LANSA can be deployed to NT and Unix is a big advantage."

A Strategic Partnership Based on Mutual Benefits

"We run joint seminars with LANSA and work together as a team. We look at LANSA as a product that will continue to be successful by providing the features we need. LANSA looks at us as a partner who will get the job done and be successful. We have a good reputation and implementation record, so Strategic recommending a LANSA solution means something. LANSA has a good reputation and LANSA recommending us as a solution partner also means a lot."

Michael concludes, "One of the goals we had when we formed the LANSA business partnership was to do a major re-write of our systems. LANSA gives us the ability to develop multi-lingual systems and target international business. For us to grow in the niche motor vehicle systems market we must tap into the international market. LANSA will help us to get there."

Company and System Information

- Strategic Business Systems is a LANSA Business Partner.

- Strategic offers a dealer communication help desk for those customers that do not want to spend time on communication and IT issues of their dealers. Alternatively a company may completely outsource its data center to Strategic. AM General, the maker of the Hummer, a military truck, has all its dealers communicate directly with the Strategic office.

- Strategic also offers document imaging and Internet services to companies across all industries. Strategic's Technical Products division uses the technology developed for the motor vehicle business and offers that to companies outside the motor vehicle business. For example in document imaging Strategic has customers in the distribution, trucking and insurance area.

- For more information visit Strategic on the Web at: www.sbsusa.com

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