

LANSA Case Study

Garment manufacturer in Top Form with Protex and LANSA

Top Form International is a leading manufacturer of women's underwear and brasserie. Top Form has multiple manufacturing sites in Asia and distributes its products worldwide under OEM contracts with miscellaneous famous brand names, including Sara Lee's Playtex, Vanity Fair's Vasaret, Bendon, Natory, and Mary-Jo.

Top Form has achieved significant efficiencies in its manufacturing by implementing Protex ERP, a LANSA based vertical market solution for the Garment and Footwear Industries solution from Datel, a LANSA business partner with offices in the UK and Hong Kong.

"Protex has a strong focus on procurement management, so we are gradually experiencing reductions in our raw materials stock levels. We now get accurate information that includes how much raw materials we have, where this stock is stored, whether or not we have enough fabrics to support a specific order, and if not, how much we need to buy and when we need to buy it," says **Mr. Fung**, Chairman of Top Form International.



The Challenge

Top Form has its head quarters in Hong Kong and manufacturing sites in China (Shenzen and Nanhoi), Philippines (Manila) and Thailand (Bangkok). Altogether there are over 6,000 sewing machines. Each manufacturing site has its own stock and stock movements between sites need to be charged.

"We are competing on cost and quality and we are part of a fashion industry that is influenced by local taste and trends. So accordingly we need a good system to help with the overall efficiency of our manufacturing operations. We always strive to get our products to market faster and to reduce our manufacturing cost," explains Mr. Fung.

There are two types of manufacturing. The first type ("Make to Stock") is where a company produces and sells finished goods out of stock. The second type ("Make to Order") is where production only starts when there is a customer order. This second type is applicable to Top Form. Systems that are suitable for the first type of manufacturing have an emphasis on finished goods inventory. The type of manufacturing solution Top Form was looking for needed to have an emphasis on material control and job costing.

Kevin Liu, project manager at Top Form, explains "The requirements in the garment industry are very specific and the general ERP solutions are not suitable for us. The general ERP solutions cannot handle the multiple levels of fit, size and color that we have in a single product style.



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The raw material definition and units of measure are very specific to our industry as well."

"Before we used Protex we used an in house developed system. That system could not handle multiple factories. To enhance the old system was not a good idea, because it was not very well developed and it was not year 2000 compatible."

"We short listed eight products that were available in Hong Kong. Except for Protex, these solutions were incomplete. Most of them focussed on distribution and had hardly any manufacturing functionality. For us Materials Requirements Planning (MRP) is crucial. We wanted the manufacturing, purchasing and distribution modules from the same vendor. Protex was the only solution covering all three areas well."

"While for us the functionality of the solution was more important than the tool it was developed in, we did consider LANSA's large user base and also felt re-assured by the IBM® and Gartner reports that LANSA is a well established development tool."

The Benefits

"In all garment manufacturing companies you will typically find the same four major operation steps, being Cutting, Sewing, Inspection and Packing. Last year we implemented Protex core functionality in all these four areas. This year we will implement the detail steps within each of these four major operations. For example, within Sewing, we expect to define up to 40 operation steps in Protex. Even though we have only implemented phase one, we can already see significant benefits."

"Firstly, we have reduced our raw materials stock levels. We now know exactly how much material to buy and when to buy it. Now that we use Protex, we can better monitor the raw materials and we have gradually reduced stock to a lower level."

“Secondly, we have a much better control over our own manpower and machine availability, compared with the order loading. This means we can do proper capacity planning. In the old system we only had rough estimates that were mostly calculated manually. Now we have a much more scientific way to calculate our capacity, taking into account not only the manpower, machines and number of hours, but also variations that we may experience in producing a certain style of bra.”

“There was quite a lot of customization in the MRP module. We have no experience ourselves yet developing with LANSA, since we rely on Incode for this. However, the modifications seemed easy to make and implement and were all delivered on time. Therefore, from an end user point of view, LANSA seems a reliable and efficient tool.”

Martin Rath, Director, Datel explains the importance of the Datel and LANSA business partnership, “In an ever changing market place it is essential for us to keep ahead of IT developments so we can react to customer requirements fast. The LANSA toolset enables us to do this as it provides great flexibility, with its mutli-lingual capabilities and continuous enhancements. For Top Form the multi-lingual functions have proved to be invaluable. For example, the



Protex plant managers in China may choose Chinese, while the Protex managers in the Philippines may prefer English, both of them using the central Protex installation.”

“Protex and LANSA help us to manage our capacity planning better.”

“Top Form is a forward-thinking organisation that wanted to work with an IT supplier who is progressive. LANSA has evolved its toolset enabling Datel to enhance its solution offering. An example of this is the use of LANSA as a platform for product development in the eCommerce arena, we saved eighteen months in terms of development time for our eCommerce solution suite. The Visual LANSA Framework has provided us with the basis for rapid development and deployment for new windows extensions to our product offering such as Protex Warehouse Management (WMS). Both these have been key in us winning new business and retaining existing customers as they can see we are meeting their requirements now and way into the future.”

The Future

James Jim, IT Manager at Top Form comments “We selected Protex on its functionality, but it is an additional benefit that it has been developed in LANSA. I was looking to introduce a more productive development environment for Top Form. Meanwhile we have two developers with LANSA skills and I am planning to have two more people trained in LANSA.”

“Currently I am looking at extending some of our RPG applications with LANSA for Windows. We have no immediate plans to extend our applications with a browser interface, however LANSA’s success with Web applications is very reassuring.”

Mr. Fung concludes, “Protex and LANSA help us to manage our capacity planning better. After the second phase of our Protex development, we should be able to capture the information of manufacturing activities, payroll, efficiency analysis, output, shipping data and more. With that set of integrated information we can generate information for management decisions. We can do this without having to do rounds of data entry and without having to manually crunch numbers.”

Company and System Information

- In 1963 Mr. Frank Lo and Mr. Eddie Wong, the Top Form founders, commenced to produce brassiere as a sub-contractor for Top Form with 20 sewing machines. They took over the business of Top Form in 1970. At that time, Top Form had 100 sewing machines. Now Top Form has close to 7,000 sewing machines in four manufacturing plants and 8,500 employees. In 1999 Top Form had a turnover of 710 million HK\$ (about 100 million US\$).
- Over 200 users connect to Top Form’s central AS/400 model 600 in Hong Kong. About 100 users connect from the two manufacturing plants in China and another 100 users are spread between Hong Kong, Thailand and the Philippines. The two Chinese sites each have a 64K satellite line, the Philippines a 64K leased line and Thailand is upgrading to a 64K line.
- For more information visit: www.topformbras.com
- Protex ERP is a complete IT solution for the apparel and footwear industries, developed and marketed by the Datel Group, a LANSA business partner headquartered in the UK with a sales and support office in HongKong. Among Protex customers are Burberrys, Dunlop and Coats Viyella in the UK, Guess in Philippines and Prima (Adidas manufacturers) in Indonesia.
- For more information visit: www.datelprotex.com

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