LANSA Case Study

National Assembly for Wales breaks ground with LANSA

The National Assembly for Wales develops and implements policies, which reflect the particular needs of the people of Wales. Wales is part of the UK and has approximately 3 million people. The Finance Division of the Assembly has implemented several LANSA Web solutions to an Intranet with over 3,000 users. These include strategic solutions for analyzing budget and operational information, as well as internal office solutions for claiming Travel & Subsistence expenses. Currently the Finance Division is exploring a LANSA XML interface between its central finance system and sub systems throughout the Assembly.

Allan Strange, IT Director, Finance Corporate Systems at the Assembly, says, "LANSA allows us to deliver sophisticated solutions with a very small development team. We have only three analyst-programmers, while many other departments have double our staff. We probably would need twice or three times as many developers using other tools. We are very proud of our performance."

The Challenge

Allan explains briefly how to see the role of his department within the Assembly and the IT challenges it faces. "The vast majority of public money that gets spent in Wales comes through the Assembly. Currently Wales' annual budget is about 10 billion pounds. Policy makers decide how that budget should be spent, but it is our department managing and monitoring the actual funds and spending. Departments who need to make payments or gather money use us as a finance system."

"For example, for the agriculture department we make about 150,000 subsidy payments to farming businesses. Another 50,000 mostly monthly payments go health, education and other local authorities. And the Assembly spends some money directly to various roads and transportation projects."

"Our computing infrastructure throughout the office is provided by a network of PCs to around 3,000 users. This network is supported by Siemens Business Systems. Within this infrastructure there are departments that have their own databases and servers. For example the Agriculture and HR departments each have UNIX servers, but most other departments have Windows servers. Our Finance department has been using AS/400 servers since 1990."

"Staff gets reimbursed within three days, instead of five weeks."

"Our current Ledger system was written by JBA and we have a number of in-house developed sub-systems based around this. We did the initial development with RPG, however in the early nineties we came to the conclusion that RPG was not productive enough."

"We then selected JBA's IPG program generator. This was fine for 5250 programs, but after a few years when we wanted to move to a Windows GUI, IPG couldn't do that. We looked at JBA's GUIdelines, but that tool required a very different skill-set and could not deliver 5250. We wanted to keep using terminals and gradually move to a Windows user interface, without having to redevelop in a very different tool."

The Solution

"In 1995 we were introduced to LANSA at a software show. We were quite impressed that from a single set of source code we could continue to deliver 5250 applications and also Windows applications. So, that is what sold LANSA to us."

LANSA
ADVANCED SOFTWARE MADE SIMPLE
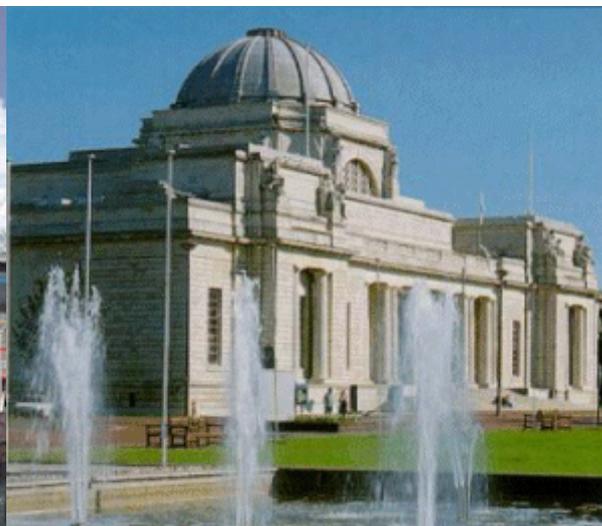
"LANSA gave us platform independence. Very soon after we started to use LANSA we decided to use it for all new development. And that is what we have done since 1995. We now offer Web and Windows solutions with LANSA and still support some 5250 solutions as well," continues Allan.

"For example, we have an annual legal process where a budget is proposed, and then goes through cycles of voting and amending till it is finally voted approved. Our 60 elected Assembly Members (AM) and their research staff can use a LANSA for the Web based inquiry solution for this. They can click on a major expenditure group, say Health, and drill down to the required level of detail. We hold up to 9 years of budget information, several versions for the current year and three years of forward budget planning."

"Approved budgets and other strategic decisions are monitored through a LANSA for the Web based Operational Plan, where overall targets are broken down to manageable layers. There are projects, tasks, target dates, measurable milestones and managers to make sure that a priority is supported and delivered. Within a project some items may be flagged as being business critical for close monitoring. This Operational Plan is a LANSA for the Web based solution and provides a high-level management board control mechanism."

One of our more recent LANSA Web solutions is an internal office application for travel and subsistence claims. Web Wizards guide the applicant through a series of questions with multiple-choice answers. Once the relevant information has been gathered, a calculation engine works out how much money is due. The applicant has the opportunity to review the claim before sending it for approval. The manager of the applicant will then receive an email with the URL of the specific travel claim and can either approve or reject the claim. The claimant will get an email message once the claim is approved or rejected. Approved claims are automatically processed through the bank clearing system. Typically staff gets reimbursed within three days, while this took around five weeks in the manual system.

The Benefits

"There are about 3,000 PC's connected to the Assembly's Intranet, and most of those have access to one or more of the applications that we are providing," continues Allan. "The establishment of an Intranet infrastructure started a drive around the office to use Web technology as a way of imparting information."

"So while a lot of the divisions are publishing static MS Word or Front Page type of information on the Intranet, we in Finance were the first department, and probably still the only, that is actually serving real-time transactional Web applications. With LANSA and iSeries we are way ahead of the rest."

"With LANSA we can serve integrated Web solutions from our iSeries. This means we can deliver graphical and user friendly applications to people's desktops, without having to purchase, install or maintain kits of software on thousands of individual desktops."

"Without LANSA we wouldn't be tackling these kind of projects."

"If we didn't have a product like LANSA, we wouldn't be tackling the kinds of projects that we are doing. Imagine having to do the same in bits of RPG, JAVA and CGI. It is hard work doing it any other way than LANSA, and we are not resourced for that."

"LANSA allows us to deliver sophisticated solutions with a very small development team. We have only three analyst-programmers, while many other departments have double our staff. We probably would need twice or three times as many developers using other tools. We are very proud of our performance."

"LANSA is one tool. This means one skill set for 5250, Web and Windows applications. Of course you have to understand the basics of Web events and HTML, but LANSA does take most of the complexity away. We are able to deliver Web solutions with our own original RPG and AS/400 trained developers."

Conclusion

"One of our first applications with LANSA was to build front end sub-systems to our JBA Purchase Ledger. These sub-systems are still used and streamline the financial data entry process across departments. We defined our complex validations in the LANSA Repository and these validations are applied to both interactive transaction entry and batch files with transactions produced by other departments. I imagine that we would need about twice as many administrative staff to check, calculate and enter transactions without this LANSA front-end," says Allan.

"At the moment we are going through the process of replacing the JBA software with Coda Financials. Coda offers an XML interface to its financial transactions and ledgers. Now we are now looking at LANSA Integrator to pick up information from the existing sub-systems and transform and redirect the transactions into XML to the new Coda system. We can re-use existing LANSA validations and logic, so the development effort should be minimal."

"As a Government department offering a central Finance service to other departments, we feel we should take a very progressive stance with Web and XML technologies and encourage other departments to do the same. We need to break some ground really and with LANSA it is easy to do that."

Company and System Information

- The Assembly develops and implements policies, which reflect the particular needs of the people of Wales. Elections are held every four years. Wales is part of the UK and the Secretary of State for Wales and Members of Parliament from Welsh constituencies have seats in Westminster.
- For more information visit www.wales.gov.uk
- The Assembly uses an iSeries 400 model 170 development and has recently upgraded to a model 730 for its production environment.

LANSA
ADVANCED SOFTWARE MADE SIMPLE