

## Formica Corporation Adds to Cache of Web-Based Customer Service Tools

Two years have passed since the web-based order inquiry, inventory inquiry, and order tracking systems were rolled out at Formica Corporation and MIS Manager, Phil Catlin still can't sit undisturbed in his office at the company's Cincinnati, Ohio headquarters and reflect on his accomplishments. He has to run to keep up with the huge volume of new requests to build more intranet and extranet applications. "I have a list of enhancements and additions to this as long as my arm," says Catlin.



Formica Corporation licensed ProGen WebSmart from Business Computer Design Corporation (BCD) in 2001 to develop a system that allowed contractors who sell and install their surfaces and flooring products to check inventory availability and order status on the web. "Our goal initially was to enable our network of worldwide distributors to function as though they were all under one roof," says Catlin. "Based on conversations with

distributors, having inventory information on-line lets them close more sales. Distributors can inquire against our inventory and tell the customer when they'll get the product in the first phone call." Catlin adds that before the distributor extranet came to be, they'd have to hang up with the customer, call Formica, and then call them back.

The Information Technology department at Formica Corporation supports the company's headquarters facility and six North American manufacturing plants with an AS/400 740, with 12 processors. "Its right at 4,000 cpw which actually puts it in the middle of the 825 range," says Catlin. BCPS from SSA Global Technologies supports the plants. Formica's IT department is comprised of 17 people including technicians, a business analyst and management.

**Floored by Dealer Response**  
Catlin cites some interesting statistics relating to utilization of the first three applications. Just in March of 2003, the inventory inquiry system served 14,000 inquiries and the order inquiry system was accessed 5,000

times. Also, 490 orders were placed through the extranet order entry system. "The dealer extranet site averages 160 hits per hour. It jumped fast since we first installed it. People are not calling customer service any more," Catlin adds. "We didn't expect people to place a lot of orders through this system. We already had EDI, and most dealers have their own order management system that uses FTP. We're delighted that we're getting in the ball park of 500 orders a month-they're orders we don't have to key."

Several new applications have been developed with WebSmart since then. Catlin refers to a new system just launched in February 2003 that provides information on rebates. "Customers can go on and see what products are included in the rebates, what the rebate levels are, and who is authorized to them, he says." The March 2003 report showed inquiries to the rebate site for the month numbered 500.

*For more information on ProGen WebSmart and other BCD software solutions, log in at [www.bcdsoftware.com](http://www.bcdsoftware.com).*

A system that generates downloadable invoice images for dealers has also been recently completed. In this case, a WebSmart generated HTML form overlays the invoice data yielding a printable invoice. "We're getting 9,000 inquiries to that per month. People beat the heck out of this," adds Catlin. Previously, Visual Basic was used to create the overlays. "The WebSmart developed program has much less of an impact on AS/400 resources." Catlin intends to replace all of Formica Corporation's existing Visual Basic programs.

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Formica Corporation's WebSmart developers have added shipping information to the list of things dealers can access from their browser. On average, this system is accessed 600 times to display the bill of lading, ship list number, invoice number, and carrier contact information for customer orders.

A margin analysis screen is also now available to internal users. This system allows salesmen to build an order and analyze markup and his commission line by line. "He can enter a target percentage and the system will calculate a price, or he can enter a target price and the system will calculate the percentage of markup."

Formica Corporation customers will be able to query a new pricing inquiry that's going on line this

month. This new price inquiry system augments the inventory inquiry system that already exists by allowing dealers to check items that aren't in stock. "You can go in and see your price and quantity breaks on anything." Presently Formica Corporation has 39,000 active SKUs. Their BPCS Item Master has 121,000.

A credit claims entry and maintenance system will soon be completed too. "This one is huge," says Catlin. "We have had to use their (BCD'S) support a couple times for this one." Initially, Formica Corporation CSRs will be able to file a return request on behalf of a distributor by accessing the corresponding invoice via intranet and making changes to it. Formica Corporation management can then approve or deny the claim. "We will be able to see the net effect of any previous credits issued against this invoice which will already be netted out," remarks Catlin. Built in cross-references will let Formica management generate reports on credits against a specific item, invoice, time period, and customer. "A lot of stuff that BPCS doesn't give you we have thrown in to this." This system will eventually be rolled out to the extranet for distributor access.

### Counter Intelligence

Formica marketeers are contributing to Catlin's workload too. Because of the metrics and reporting capabilities built into the systems, reams of data on what customers are interested in can be gnashed into new sales. "The marketing people want to know how many visitors are going into inventory inquiry versus order entry. If you inquired on white

laminare countertop material, did you come back and buy white laminare? Now you can follow these things up," he says. "We have put a bunch of reports in there with drill down capabilities. We can look at our top 25 customers and look at what they bought this year compared to last year, by product line, region, customer...all those different things."

To think all this additional activity must have some negative impact on the AS/400s performance wouldn't be unreasonable, right? Surprisingly, the impact is negligible. Catlin comments, "We don't see any load from this on our system. It's so invisible it's ridiculous."

All of the new systems that have followed the WebSmart-developed web-based order inquiry, inventory inquiry and order tracking systems, have kept Catlin and his team very busy. "It has increased our visibility too though," adds Catlin. "IT is turning the corner from a tactical resource to a strategic one and we have proven that we can do what we say we can do."

  
  

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