



Streamlined and simplified procurement system developed using existing RPG code with looksoftware and ASP.net

Headquartered in Bristol, England, **Alexandra plc** provides the UK's premier range of uniforms and workwear, including medical, hospitality and catering clothing. As a leading supplier of work clothing, they are dedicated to innovative garment design, providing clients with top quality work clothes at competitive prices and with the highest levels of service and support.

Alexandra was founded in 1958 as a mail order workwear business and since those early days, it has grown into a multi-location manufacturing and sales organisation. As a publicly listed company, its latest financial reports for January 2007 indicate sales of £81.5m, with profit from operations at £8m. These figures indicate respectively a healthy 6% and 16% increase on last year's results, with employee numbers breaching 1,000 across its international locations.

Manufacturing has been focussed for over ten years on the Morocco plant and as well as a number of regional sales & support centres throughout the UK, Alexandra also has operations in Raamsdonksveer in Holland, Roissy and Paris in France and in Dublin, Ireland.

The company sells its clothing under a number of brands including 'Alex Corporate Clothing', 'Prima Corporate Wear' and 'de Baer' tailored corporate clothing. In 2002 the company was granted a Royal Warrant of Appointment to Her Majesty the Queen and proudly sports the Royal Warrant on its corporate id as seen above.

The Challenge

With buyers accessing their e-Commerce website from many diverse locations and using different procurement applications, Alexandra was keen to develop a solution that delivered a customized, streamlined procurement process. They wanted their customers to be able to select and order product – from within their own particular procurement application – in one simple, uninterrupted operation.

Alexandra are a typical System i customer – satisfied with their customised back-end applications and the RPG language, but needing to deliver new web based solutions quickly.

Communications between the buyers' applications and the e-Commerce website would need to be maintained transparently, in the background via Commerce XML (cXML).

Solution & Benefits

Working with **Alexandra**, **SAS** (www.sas-it.eu) developed 'Punchout'; creating an enhanced version of the existing RPG code which **SAS** used as the basis for the Web application. Using **looksoftware's soarchitect**, the key RPG functions were service-enabled, making this functionality available to any other application, development tool or device that supports web services. **SAS** had significant experience in using Microsoft's Visual Studio and delivered the ASP.net web site in no time.

"Using **looksoftware's** products we've been able to reuse our existing System i applications to drive the new web front-end and integrate with our back-end RPG code in real-time," said Ken Turner, Systems Manager at Alexandra.

Improvements

As a result of this improved customer interface, Alexandra's customers have been provided with a greatly streamlined and simplified procurement system. Punchout's design means all the necessary transactions like quotations, orders, purchases etc, can be automatically processed by the customers' own procurement applications and within Alexandra's fulfillment application, with little or no human intervention. Indeed that is only required where there is a need for approvals or authorisations etc.

The business benefits are enormous to Alexandra and its customers alike. Procurement and fulfillment processes are simplified, automated and accelerated – and of course the opportunity for error is significantly reduced, thereby improving accuracy and productivity.

The technical benefits are also significant. Alexandra can continue to rely on RPG and their System i as their primary platform. New business rules written in RPG can be exposed as web services in minutes, enabling easy integration with other applications and platforms.

"With the experience gained, we can see many more areas where **looksoftware's** products will be of great use in reusing our primary System i applications to drive other new web based solutions." said Ken. Without doubt, this has resulted in a 'win-win' for all and 'Punchout' firmly establishes Alexandra plc as a premier trading partner for its existing customers and those new customers it hopes to win over!

Second project goes live in 2 months!

The success of the 'Punchout' project has led to the continuing partnership between Alexandra and **SAS** and they have now developed an improved 'Retail' facility, which is to include credit card processing, emulating the significant functionality largely derived from 'Punchout' and went live in two months!