

CONNX[®] Case Study

Allied Electronics

Allied Electronics Gets Positive Charge from CONNX Professional Services

The Team That Got Results

Thomas A. Edison would have been proud. When Allied Electronics, an electrocomponents distributor in Fort Worth, Texas, came to CONNX with the spark of an idea about how to increase sales at the 70 branch offices scattered throughout the United States and Canada, there was electricity in the air.

The idea was to create a quote system that could use Allied data stored in an RMS database running on a VMS server. The Allied Quote system enables managers, salespersons, credit managers, and product managers to communicate through Web forms using ASP.NET technology. Through the forms they are able to produce new quotes for customers, get management approval on certain quotes, have a contact database, provide a way for the various users to register inventory checks, and create orders, among a long list of other activities.

"Our main interest was to capture data that was getting lost during phone conversations with customers, and also to be more responsive to the changes in our entry process. Gathering all the data on our quotes would give us a lot more information, . . . allow our salespeople to dispose of their need to keep voluminous files on all of their customers . . . but also keep information about what our customers order and would like to order, why we are or are not converting quotes to orders, and general trends in pricing and what we are selling," says Alan Bruns, IS Director at Allied.

Easy deployment and the ability for Allied's developers to maintain the project after the project was complete was a requirement. ASP.NET was selected as an effective technology to achieve these objectives. CONNX Solutions and Allied worked as partners in creating a detailed specification that involved examining over 20 years of a rich and complex existing code base.

Allied's part in the initial stages was to validate the documentation of the business rules. As Brun says, "The first thing was to enumerate what they were, so that we at least had a chance to carry them out in the new code. It was necessary to dig through the existing code, decide what the current business rules were, and then discuss them amongst us here at Allied, and decide which ones we wanted to carry out and which ones we wanted to toss away."

CONNX Manager of Professional Services Mike McKee and his team of developers and testers took on the task of creating the new Web application for Allied. After the detailed specification was signed off, the combined development team produced over 30 distinct Web forms and utilized

Loc	Qty
Avnet	98
Vendor	NA
Allied	184

Quantity	Price
1	
100	
500	
1000	
5000	

- Using CONNX, Allied Electronics Web-enabled a new quote-taking system for 70 branch offices
- Allied Electronics was able to make their legacy RMS data available in a user-friendly online format
- Web access helps management track lost orders and valuable contact information
- Web entry of data increases efficiency of quote-taking process
- Increased efficiency and improved processes lead to potentially increased revenue

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-- Alan Bruns, IS Director at Allied Electronics

Allied Case Study continued

over 50 different RMS files that made up the quote system.

The final product is divided into several basic areas that enable Allied salespeople to track their current contacts, enter new contacts, record customer needs, perform product entry, perform credit checks, arrange shipments of any sort, arrange pricing and discounts, and manage approvals, among other things.

The approval rating of the quote system is very high. According to Bruns, "My impression is that the people who are really most important in this are the hierarchy in sales. . . we're generating orders, we're generating quotes, we're generating a lot of data that's going to be very useful to us..."

As for return on investment, Bruns says, "How do you put a value on a contact database? Pretty tough!...Give us six months...and we'll have a good start on a contact relationship management system....that'll save us a whole bunch of bucks just like that."

Ken Messer, IS Manager at Allied, found that the new Web application helped save them money in unexpected ways. "We're able to flag every shipping address as to whether it's a residence or not...we'd been getting hit for large amounts of money for delivery of packages to residential addresses...as many as 100 a week...we're talking many, many thousands of dollars. I'm thinking that in one year's time, perhaps a quarter to a third of the cost of the original project could be recouped."

Another benefit of the new quote system is that it increases accountability within the organization. As Bruns says, "The communications between our purchasing departments and sales departments is much, much better since using the quote system. I think anyone that's been involved with the quote system has a much better feel that we're all working to achieve the same thing...it helps our folks to respond more quickly...people have a lot better handle on what's going on with their quotes."

JoAnn Santos, Allied Electronics Branch Manager in Seattle, says

that, from the user side of the quote system, things couldn't be better. Since managers in the system can easily access their salespeople's quote lists, she can cover for them if they're out and can take incoming quote requests more easily. "I can easily see how many quotes we entered into the quote system today, I can see how much volume we're quoting, and it gives me a ballpark of what our sales figures are going to be for the day... and I can get a feel for what's going on. I didn't have any such visibility before...the salespeople really like it...it saves time...it's very easy to use."

As the project neared completion, there was some concern about whether Allied would be able to continue with the system without continual CONNX support. This worry was quickly allayed the closer and closer it got to completion. "Handoff was so smooth," says Bruns, "One big goal in this project was to be, at the end of it, able to do without CONNX as much as possible, and we have achieved that goal to where we're maintaining the software, we're making changes to it, ...but if we needed specific help, I would call CONNX again."

The ability to work together smoothly and the ability to assist in weeding through all the requirements and business rules of the new application required a strong sense of teamwork, empathy, and a deep concern for the needs of the customer. It's a challenge for any business to decide to change a business process that has been in use for many years, and that's why it was important for Allied to choose the right partner, one who offered years of business experience, technical know-how, and creative solutions to their goals.

Both Messer and Bruns believe they found such a team in the Professional Services Division at CONNX. In addition to recommending CONNX to any other business interested in reengineering legacy applications or any other new possibilities, Messer says, "...We always got all the answers we needed, and I feel that (we, ed.) are the best of friends. It was a great partnership."

Since 1928, when it was established as the radio parts distribution arm of the Columbia Radio Corporation, Allied Electronics has been providing excellence through customer service. Now, as part of the Electrocomponents Group of the United Kingdom, Allied has added a global presence to its customer orientation. This combination of Allied's commitment to a high level of customer services and Electrocomponents' global reach ensures a powerful solution to meeting all present and future customer demands.

CONNX Solutions, Inc., with its flagship software product, CONNX, brings EAI/universal data access technology to over 3,000 organizations worldwide by enabling access to all enterprise data, regardless of origin, through one interface. The company maintains strategic relationships with industry-leading organizations including Microsoft Corporation; Oracle Corporation; Sybase Inc.; Informix; Computer Associates International, Inc.; IBM Corporation; and Compaq Computer Corporation. Founded in 1989, CONNX remains locally owned and managed through its headquarters in Redmond, Washington. For more information, contact CONNX Sales at (425) 519-6600, or visit our Web site at www.connx.com



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