

LANSA Case Study

Blackmer lifts dealer service with Web access to BPCS

Blackmer, a Dover Company, incorporated in 1903 and located in Michigan, North America, is the world's leading manufacturer of positive displacement pumps, centrifugal pumps and compressors for the transfer of liquid and gas products. Blackmer serves a wide variety of industries via its global network of distributors and OEMs and used LANSA to give distributors online access to orders and account information in its BPCS ERP.



Christopher A. Kanous, IT director at Blackmer, says, "We reduced costs by eliminating manual keying of orders and increased customer satisfaction with real-time account and order access. LANSA provided rapid delivery of standard eCommerce functionality plus the tools and services for a Web configurator for custom orders at a significantly lower price than the competitor's solution."

Rapid Growth and Custom Orders

Blackmer's products are used in a number of industries including refined fuels, pulp & paper, oilfield, wastewater, food & sanitary, military and commercial marine, transport and chemical processing. Most of Blackmer's customers are distributors who specialize in a specific industry, for which they understand the equipment requirements thoroughly.

"We have experienced application engineers working for us who can give the skeleton configuration for virtually any application, but most of the time our distributors know exactly what they want to order," explains Kanous. "They are the ones who know the application and they know what they need."

"Before we had the online capability, orders were taken in via fax and phone by our customer service department and then keyed into our BPCS ERP, which we have been using since 1996."

"We are rapidly expanding our business and our customer service team, who also handled the majority of the account and product inquiries, often had to put customers on hold or ask them whether we could call back later. To guarantee fast customer service we would have had to add staff and also work in shifts, as over 60 percent of our orders and inquiries are from overseas time zones."

"Giving distributors Web access was the obvious solution. But as most of our orders are for custom-configured pumps, a standard Web catalogue solution would not suffice."

"We run a stock standard version of BPCS 8.2.01 and our

*Our cost per order
has come down
substantially.*

business philosophy is to keep it that way, so anything that meant modification to BPCS was not considered. We also wanted the site to run on the same server and update the BPCS database in real time."

"I had seen LANSA at trade shows, in magazines and also was impressed by the LANSA-powered Web sites I visited. I knew LANSA had experience with BPCS and could integrate tightly on the same System i platform. On top of that, the price for LANSA, including their services to customize and implement the BPCS Web extension, was about a third of what we would have spent for a vendor solution."

Rules-based Configuration

To handle standard orders, Blackmer chose to implement LANSA's Commerce Edition for BPCS, a B2B self-service framework solution for account, price and inventory inquiry and order entry and tracking. The framework would then be extended with a Web configurator module built in LANSA for placing custom orders.

The Web inquiry site was released to distributors within two months. The order entry facility for standard items was ready soon after, but Blackmer held back deploying the Web ordering until the Web configurator was ready to be released, as most distributors place mixed orders for both standard parts and custom-configured pumps.



With the assistance of LANSA Services, Blackmer created a question-and-answer script that feeds into the BPCS file structure. Thousands of questions, answers and business rules allow the configuration of even the most complex and diverse application pumps.

Kanou explains, "It is what is called a rules-based configurator, meaning options are based on answers to previous questions. We have similar questions and answers in our BPCS configurator system, so the additional work by our engineering department was not significant."

"All custom configurations, whether entered by customer service or by the distributor, are now reviewed online by our application engineers. Many of our pumps are used in hazardous applications, pumping acids and compressed gasses that can be very explosive and flammable. The product liability issues are huge."

"Once the order has passed the review process, we send out a very detailed order acknowledgement to the distributor by email. The distributor then has 24 hours to make changes without charge, before we start building the pump."

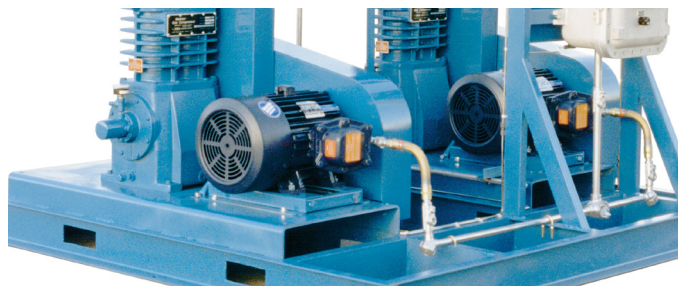
"When we have the parts in stock we can assemble, paint and test pumps very quickly. We have a foundry on site to make our own castings. Blackmer is highly vertically integrated. Our production is very efficient and we turn a lot of orders around within 24 hours, so smooth order entry procedures are important. Unusual configurations may take three days to two weeks before we ship."

Faster, 24x7 Service

"Web ordering has been very well accepted by our distributors. We originally thought that we would have to offer our distributors incentives to place their orders online."

"But most of the distributors love it because they can make decisions while they are ordering. They may fine tune or upgrade their configuration as they see prices and options on their screen. They have more control over the ordering process."

"While the distributor is online to place an order, they can also look at their account details and status of pending orders, or reprint an invoice. The reaction from our distributors has been outstanding. They love the ability to get the information on their own without having to make a phone call. They also love the fact it is always available."



Company and System Information

- Blackmer, a Dover company, is a global leader in the design and manufacture of high-quality flow technologies, including peristaltic hose, eccentric disc and rotary vane positive displacement pumps, centrifugal pumps, screw compressors, air elimination systems, and sliding vane and reciprocating compressors for the transfer of liquid and gas products. Blackmer pumps and compressors are used worldwide in a variety of industries, including LPG, Chemical and Industrial Processing, Energy, Food & Sanitary, Military/Marine, and the Mobile Transport industries. Blackmer is the global leader in flow solutions for light petroleum and biofuels and the U.S. Navy has specified Blackmer pumps on every ship for the past 50 years. For more information visit: www.blackmer.com
- Blackmer uses BPCS version 8.2.01 running on a System i model 550 that is partitioned with the LANSA Web site and BPCS operations run in separate partitions.

LANSA has turned out to be an excellent value for investment.

"Our customer service has improved by offering the online alternative. Customer service now has more time to help distributors who have questions that the Web site cannot answer. Their work has become more interesting, because the mundane routine queries are now handled by the Web."

"The site takes a lot of orders and inquiries outside our office hours. This is especially important for our overseas distributors, who are over 60 percent of our business."

"We are growing the business and we can handle the increased volume without adding additional staff or working overtime."

"We don't have to touch Web orders and our cost per order has come down substantially."

"Our overseas subsidiary companies are also using the Web solution. This includes our plant in Auxerre, France, which is our biggest customer in volume of orders. To get them online has provided an enormous reduction in the number of orders that had to be entered by customer service. Our subsidiaries are very happy with the efficiency the solution provides them. We also operate an assembly operation in the Czech Republic and LANSA Commerce Edition is being considered as an option for order fulfillment."

An Excellent Investment

"While Web inquiry and ordering is tightly integrated in real time with our BPCS ERP system, we didn't have to change a single line of code," says Kanous.

The project was handled almost entirely by LANSA Services. We were not involved in writing any of the code. We just provided the rules and validated the data. Our policy is that our IT team is here to support the applications, not to develop them. We don't even have the source code of BPCS, except for the parts where we need to integrate."

"LANSA Services were always fast to respond and helped to push along any project that hovered too long in user acceptance stage. Also, we never had to spend time explaining how BPCS works."

"While we run our reporting and office applications on Windows servers, our core business applications are running on System i with its high reliability, availability and security. Web ordering for distributors is part of our core business system, so we wanted to run that on the System i as well. The LANSA Web site has added almost no extra administration."

"LANSA has turned out to be an excellent value for investment. I can't think of anybody, even at the president's level, here at Blackmer who has anything but the highest praise for the LANSA Web project," concludes Kanous.