Omron Europe launches next-generation intranet experience

Exceptional employee web experience streamlines processes, improves productivity

Overview

The need
To prepare for future business success, Omron Europe needed a way to stream-line employees' daily work processes and better use the organization's collective knowledge and expertise.

The solution
IBM Connections software embedded in IBM WebSphere Portal solution led to Ozone, a personalized intranet portal that presents applications, information and the social network in a business context.

The benefit
A unified portal for task execution, knowl-edge sharing and enhanced collaboration improved employee productivity, helping them better serve customers across two divisions.

Omron Europe is a division of Omron Corporation, a global leader in the field of industrial automation. Headquartered in Kyoto, Japan, and with annual sales of more than JPY600 billion. Omron Corporation offers approximately 200,000 products that span industrial automation, electronic components, social systems, healthcare and the environment. Omron Europe operates locally in every European country through two divisions: Industrial Automation and Electronic Components. The company's more than 2,000 employees primarily engage in sales, marketing and product distribution for the parent company. Omron Europe is based in Hoofdorp, near Amsterdam.

A need to share expertise and knowledge

With so many products targeting different markets, the success of Omron Europe depends on giving staff fast access to experts and special-ized knowledge about varied industrial processes and technologies. In fact, when analyzing its IT and business requirements for the future, Omron Europe executives concluded that employees needed to better use the organization's collective knowledge and expertise.

Two factors reinforced this need. In the past, Omron Europe functioned as a multilocal firm, but with globalization, customers are more likely to do business across country borders. So first the company needed to remove geographic obstacles to become a Pan-European organization. Second, Omron Europe was split into two divisions, with separate sales and marketing teams serving many of the same customers. Better com-munications and collaboration across divisions would help ensure that customers recognized the company as "one Omron." And a social business network could enable salespeople to share leads and information about common customers, leading to better opportunities for all.

A social business…

Embraces networks of people to create business value and exhibits three underlying tenets. It is engaged, transparent and nimble.

Engaged
Improved staff productivity across two divisions by surfacing expertise and enhancing knowledge sharing

Transparent
Reduced barriers dividing the client's geographically dispersed workforce by helping enable freer, interactive communications

Nimble
Accelerated response to customer needs through enhanced communications, collaboration and knowledge sharing

Entry point: Optimizing work

"We are much more than the sum of our parts," says Michel Min, strategic communication and e-marketing manager, Omron Europe. "That was the driving force behind creating a portal and social business network to better share knowledge and experience and to strengthen the flow of information across all departments and geographies. Our ultimate goal was not just knowledge transfer from one employee to another but to transfer organizational knowledge and expertise to the customer as quickly as possible."

Omron Europe already had an intranet based on portal technology, but it was more a static entity for sharing corporate information from the top down than a dynamic tool essential to the flow of information and employees' daily work. Aided by IBM Premier Business Partner Portico Consultancy, Omron Europe executives began to see that portal technology could provide applications and information to employees based on their job roles and functions, and it could show relevant information in the context of the business activity performed.

Navigating into the portal functionality required that the project team conduct a business value analysis (BVA). The idea was to clarify the business needs of the organization, such as the optimal way to introduce a marketing campaign, how best to receive information and offer feedback, and which capabilities would increase employee efficiency. Typical answers included: "I need to find the solar expert in Germany," "Information is everywhere, but searching is an issue," and "People will 'drive' themselves if they have a destination and a good dashboard." The BVA also inventoried available technology, finding that more employees would use existing tools if presented conveniently and in the proper context.

Integrating portal and social business software
The BVA made it clear that an advanced portal integrated with a social business network, as provided by IBM® WebSphere® Portal and IBM Connections software, would meet the client's future needs. The new portal, named Ozone, would deliver a unified, role-based window into all the applications, information and people that each employee needed for top job performance. Says Min, "The magic starts when you combine portal functionality with validated corporate information and a social business network."

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WebSphere Portal software provides a single access point to web content and back-end applications, yet delivers a differentiated experience for each user based on job-related needs. Ready-to-use business functionality speeds time to value, while IBM Web Experience Factory software makes it easy to develop custom portlet applications. IBM Web Content Manager software supports these capabilities by simplifying publication and management of the portal's content.

The WebSphere Portal solution is complemented by IBM Connections software, a social application for business that makes it easy to communicate and collaborate across a social network. Web 2.0 features such as profiles, blogs, wikis, communities, activities and tagging provide for faster task execution through quick access to shared information; better business processes through knowledge and expertise uncovered by the network; and more confident decisions that experts vet and past experiences reflect.

Employee responses in the BVA helped Omron Europe and Portico Consultancy set priorities for the portal's capabilities. "We started with a small portal platform, developing some 'killer app' portlets that the sales and marketing departments requested," says Dennis Rot, managing director of Portico Consultancy. "When people in other parts of the company saw the success, it generated a buzz within Omron about the value that a portal could bring."

Omron Europe launched the Ozone portal in early 2010. It comes up as the default dashboardlike screen when employees access the corporate network. Single sign-on helps ensure they can log on just once for all of their applications, which appear alongside relevant information from internal and external sources. The rich integration functionality of the IBM WebSphere Portal application server makes it easy to incorporate a variety of back-end and external applications, including IBM Lotus® Domino®, IBM Sametime® and Web Content Manager software and feeds from external sites. In fact, Omron Europe treated Connections software in this way, embedding it within the portal without modification. This enables the client to incorporate regularly enhanced functionality of Connections software without custom programming. The Ozone portal also features the business partner's Portal2Social tool, which uses key words and tags to inject relevant data from Connections software into the right business context. The Portal2Social tool was a finalist for the IBM Social Business Award 2012 during Lotusphere 2012.

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To encourage adoption of the Ozone portal, Omron Europe formed five launch teams that trained employees throughout the organization on how to use the portal in common business scenarios. After a short time, acceptance of the portal surpassed expectations. "I thought young people would be the main ambassadors," Min notes, "but we found that age is not really an issue. People are willing to share their knowledge and documents regardless of their age."

How the Ozone portal creates a more social business

Although metrics of the portal's ROI are still being developed, Omron Europe executives are quite pleased with its effect on employee productivity, efficiency and effectiveness, and the ultimate impact on customer service.

Managers save time by being able to comment easily on company data within the portal, simplifying the process of creating and sharing monthly financial reports. Field salespeople benefit from a portlet that integrates customer information from the CRM system with Google Maps. This enables them to see nearby customers and driving directions when making a sales call. They have more time to spend with customers, resulting in higher sales productivity and better service.

Another portlet improves sales efficiency by automatically querying the CRM system for customers who made a purchase the day before—information that helps sales staff stay informed about customer activity. And because the portal is so effective at drawing from external sources, information from social networks, such as Facebook and Twitter, can be collected and presented to track public sentiment about Omron Europe and its competitors.

The ability to search and locate company experts quickly further boosts productivity and sales effectiveness. "The sales team was looking for an expert in product packaging, and through Connections we located an associate in Switzerland who had worked in that industry for many years," says Min. "This helped us make a presentation to the customer with just the right tone and content." In addition, communities of interest, blogs, and wikis connect sales staff from different divisions to share information about common customers, government regulations, and industry trends.

The marketing department, too, benefits from the portal's ability to connect staff across geographic borders. As an example, when a brochure is being created for one country, the marketing team can discover whether something similar was created elsewhere for possible reuse. And when corporate marketers devise a campaign or brochure, they can easily garner feedback about local concerns from their counterparts across Europe. The result is a better product and increased understanding among marketing team members. The social network also makes it easier to lock in time with Omron Europe graphic designers, because their schedules are online for all to see.

The portal's convenient, unified desktop view improves productivity in another way, by bringing attention to useful applications. Sametime software for unified communications, for instance, was available for some time but hardly used. Once every employee name that appears in the portal was made Sametime-aware, usage for instant messaging and online meetings skyrocketed.

The portal has been so useful in Europe that plans are in place to deploy it to employees in Asia, and to extend the use of it outside the enterprise to business partners. The social functionality will be expanded to incorporate more information from public social networking sources such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and YouTube. And to further support employees when away from the office, the portal is being extended to support handheld mobile devices.

"We need to convey our collective and individual knowledge to the customer as quickly as possible," says Min. "We are achieving this with a unified portal that combines applications and information with a social business network, all presented in the right business context."

For more information

To learn more about IBM WebSphere Portal and IBM Connections software, please contact your IBM marketing representative or IBM Business Partner, or visit the following websites:

- **ibm.com**/software/websphere
- **ibm.com**/software/lotus/products/connections

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