Actrol Parts puts chill on rivals with mobile data base

Overview

- **The Challenge**

  Actrol Parts wanted to get a competitive edge by improving the management of its quotes database for air-conditioning and refrigeration components. It needed a system where engineers and sales representatives working onsite with customers could give accurate and on-the-spot estimates for individual projects.

- **The Solution**

  IBM® Business Partner† Notability implemented an enterprise-wide mobile quotes system using Lotus Notes® and Domino®. The new system provides daily price updates on the 9,000 different types of components it supplies. Actrol engineers and sales representatives can now download up-to-date pricing data onto notebook computers and calculate estimates for clients on the spot.

- **The Benefits**

  The new quotes system makes it easier for Actrol's personnel to deliver specific price estimates for customers that take into account complicated discounting regimes. It replaced the company's DOS-based inventory pricing database with a system that helps to boost productivity and flexibility that sets the company apart from its competitors.

About Actrol Parts

Actrol Parts, based in Blackburn, Victoria, is one of Australia's major privately owned refrigeration and air-conditioning wholesalers. It has 36 branches and 8,000 customers throughout Australia. The company sells 9,000 different components such as condensing units, compressors and control boards for commercial use.

Up-to-date price information

With branch offices throughout Australia, Actrol Parts was looking for ways to increase productivity and growth while ensuring its 150 workers and engineers had access to the information they needed.

Each customer's needs are different, whether it's a mango farmer in Queensland or a restaurant in Melbourne. Actrol's engineers measure those requirements against a backdrop of as many as seven different discount schemes. Estimates also need to include freight and courier costs that can vary branch and by state.

Notability

Staff needed to be able to quickly locate pricing information and determine discounts. Actrol wanted a database that would let the company monitor which products and brands are being ordered, who is selling them, at what price, and at what margin.

A new mobile platform

Actrol Parts worked with Notability, an IBM Business Partner[†], to extend the capabilities of its existing IBM Lotus Notes and Domino software. The end result was a new mobile database platform.

The new platform replaced the existing DOS-based system that was difficult to update and as a result contained prices that could be long out of date. Engineers and sales representatives visited clients then returned to the office to print estimates using aging dot-matrix printers, which were subject to frequent breakdowns. Clients received their estimates days later by mail or fax.

Prices can change daily for many of the components that Actrol supplies. With such a large number of different stock items, there could be 200 or 300 cost changes every day.

"The focus was a mobile communication model that was easy to use. The system had to be accessible by remote and mobile users, kept up to date and let the company monitor bids and components sales. It also had to work with the company's existing accounting software."

– Tim Rattray, Partner at Notability

Easy to use

At the centre of the new business model was a method that allowed for fast price updates that could easily be replicated onto notebook computers.

IBM Lotus Notes and IBM Lotus Domino Document Manager enable more efficient and effective information flow. Users can more easily search for and store documents, increasing productivity and efficiency.

The software is an all-in-one enterprise-wide interface that can be securely accessed both inside and outside the organisation, catering to mobile users. It provides secure, customised, real-time access to diverse data. These applications are the building blocks for an information infrastructure that orders, integrates and analyses information.

Under the new system, engineers and sales representatives spend a couple of minutes every morning downloading price data onto notebook computers from an IBM Domino server. This makes it easier for them to offer instant assessments that reflect previously agreed discounts when visiting clients. This new business model increased customer satisfaction and gave the company a competitive edge.

"We could give the customers options right then and there," said Frank Di Giulio, Actrol's Commercial Manager. "We came across as more professional and flexible and that made us more competitive."

The implementation took place over a three-month period and was subsequently installed at each of Actrol's 36 branches.

Monitoring quotes and sales in real time
Actrol has experienced a dramatic increase in flexibility and professionalism. The mobile quotes system can be easily updated and accessed by remote users. This gives Actrol the tools to supply clients with accurate and on-the-spot estimates, improving customer satisfaction.

The new system also allows Actrol to use more up-to-date printers, reducing the interruptions to business operations caused by printer breakdowns. Notability is looking into a modification that will make it easier to generate PDF files, which are less sensitive to different types of printers.

The new system also allows for greater data transparency. Actrol's managers can track quotes and sales at any given time and track which quotes are winning bids and which engineers and sales representatives are most successful.

Actrol can use this more reliable sales data to bargain for deeper discounts with manufacturers and better control its inventory.

"We have established a new platform for delivering its services faster and with increased flexibility. We have the tools to better manage our sales information better forecast and control over inventory and plan a more profitable course for the future."
– Frank Di Giulio, Actrol's Commercial Manager

For more information

Please call **132 426** in Australia or
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