**IBM** Business Partner ™

# Cable manufacturer improves call centre efficiency with intranet based on IBM WebSphere® technology

## Overview

■ **The Challenge**

*Olex Cables, a leading manufacturer of electrical cables, was struggling to cope with the volume of customer inquiries to its call centre. Staff had to wrangle a complicated order entry system accessed through green-screen terminals, which led to inefficient handling of calls and unhappy customers.*

■ **The Solution**

*Working with IBM Business Partner\* Synergy Plus, Olex created an intranet accessible through a web browser that allowed staff to access the order entry system and other applications from a single, intuitive interface. The intranet was based on IBM WebSphere Application Server and the code for the system was developed in Java.*

■ **The Benefits**

*The ease of use of the new system has increased the number of calls customer service staff can handle each hour, saving Olex Cables money and improving customer satisfaction. The company can now re-use much of the business logic it developed for the intranet to open up its systems to customers for better supply chain integration.*

**SYNERGY**

### About Olex Cables

Olex Cables is the leading electrical cable manufacturer in Australia with more than $300 million in annual revenue and over 800 employees worldwide. Based in Melbourne with manufacturing facilities in Australia and New Zealand, Olex is renowned for its range of over 20,000 different cables, its in-depth project experience and its wide range of alliances with related component vendors.

### Call centre staff needed better information

As the leading cable manufacturer in Australia, Olex Cables handles hundreds of inquiries daily concerning its power, communications and special-purpose cabling products. Customers call to request quotes, place orders, check inventory and order status, and obtain lead-time estimates.

In late 2002, Olex consolidated several distributed call centres into a single location to reduce the number of call centre staff. Around the same time, the manufacturer experienced a significant increase in small-volume quotation requests, primarily from its wholesale customers.

According to Dominic Serong, customer e-business solutions manager at Olex, this led to a 50 per cent increase in the average daily call volume. "The complexity of our order entry software, combined with the pressure to complete calls quickly, prevented all but the most experienced operators from providing sufficient information during the call," he said.

To respond to this increase in call volume, Olex needed to improve the productivity of its call centre operators. Olex operators had been using green-screen terminals to access data from Basic Process Control System (BPCS), the company's enterprise resource planning (ERP) software.

The company was running BPCS on an IBM eServer™ iSeries® (formerly called AS/400) server using the IBM DB2® Universal Database as its underlying data management system. The company also hosted a home-grown price quotation system and a sales performance measurement system on the iSeries platform.

Seeking to give its 26 call centre operators faster and easier access to the information they needed, Olex decided to replace the green-screen terminal system with an intranet, using standard web browsers to query the BPCS system and other back-end applications.

**IBM WebSphere solution based on open standards**

Olex had been looking into a proprietary order entry and inquiry solutions from its ERP vendor, but made a strategic decision to use Java technology to build a more flexible e-business infrastructure.

"We were looking for a globally accepted, open-systems standard, and Java was it," said Serong.

Olex found IBM WebSphere Application Server was the obvious software foundation for its new intranet.

"With DB2 data management software and the iSeries server, we realised we already had the underpinnings of our intranet in place," said Serong.

> *"WebSphere software from IBM completed the picture. We understood that an all-IBM e-business infrastructure would minimise our integration headaches and accelerate our time-to-market."*

Working with IBM Business Partner Synergy Plus, Olex created a three-tier Java- based call centre application, with IBM WebSphere Application Server Advanced Edition serving as the runtime environment.

To help Olex pinpoint the functions that would have the greatest impact on operator productivity and customer service, Synergy Plus started the intranet project by exploring a broad range of customer service scenarios with the operators and their managers.

"Synergy Plus was good at distilling our business needs and then meeting them by applying its knowledge of WebSphere Application Server," noted Serong. "Synergy also helped us set realistic project goals and brought in experienced architects and developers to help achieve those goals."
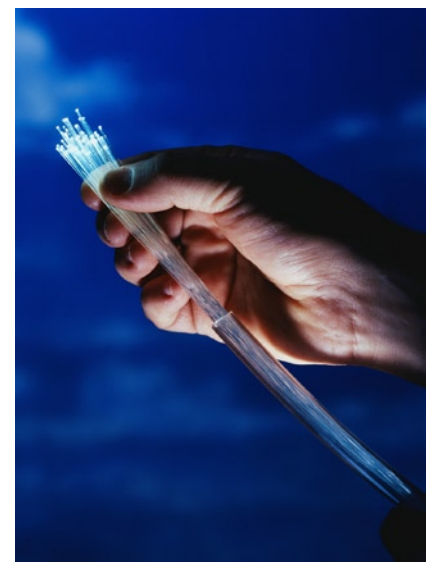
**Ease of use improves customer service**
Using IBM VisualAge for Java (now called IBM WebSphere Studio Application Developer), Olex and Synergy Plus developed and deployed five Java application modules: price and availability, order entry and maintenance, order inquiry, quotations entry and maintenance and quotations inquiry.

The 15-month development effort included designing the Java architecture, creating the business logic that accesses data from the company's back-end applications and writing the presentation code that accepts inquiry requests and delivers results to the call centre operators' web browsers. Approximately 75 to 85 per cent of the Java code is reusable, which will save considerable development time in future implementations.

As a result of the new systems, each operator can handle seven to ten phone calls, faxes or emails per hour. Response times for common inquiries have fallen dramatically, in some cases from several minutes to a few seconds. And because fewer operators are handling the increased call volume, Olex is saving an estimated $550,000 a year in labour costs. As a result, the company expects to realise full payback on the intranet within three years.

**Coming next: self service and supply chain integration**
Using the Java business logic developed for the call centre intranet, Olex has recently developed a customer self-service application that will enable authorised customers to access price and availability information from a secure area of the company's website.

However, the most dramatic customer service improvements will come when Olex's systems can communicate directly with customer systems.

"Most of our customers have their own ERP systems and would like to avoid placing orders twice: once on their own system and then again on the Olex website," said Serong.

"That's why we have made a strategic decision to publish all future applications as web services. Using the support for web services standards in WebSphere software, our customers will be able to access our order entry processes using their ERP systems. This will make us a more efficient and more appealing trading partner.

"The intranet, running under WebSphere Application Server with DB2 Universal Database, has delivered excellent performance and stability. And we are not surprised: our ERP system, running on DB2 on and IBM iSeries server, has been performing well for many years," Serong added.

*"The improved content and layout of the screens have significantly increased the number of inquiries and transactions the operator can complete while the customer is on the phone," said Serong. "As a result, the customer is better served and the operator has less catch-up work to do between calls."*

**For more information**

Please call **132 462** in Australia or
**0800 801 800** in New Zealand.