

PROOF POINT

BY LIZ TANNER

The Best of Both Worlds

LEADING PC VENDOR UNIFIES EMEA OPERATIONS FOR GREATER EFFICIENCY USING NOVELL EXTEND

Established in 1976, Acer is among the world's top ten branded PC vendors. Acer employs marketing and service operations across Asia-Pacific, Europe the Middle East and the Americas supporting dealers and distributors in over 100 nations. Today, the Acer Group employs 35,000 employees around the world. Located in Milan, Italy, Acer EMEA covers Europe, the Middle East and Africa and is one of four regional operations for Acer.



Challenge

Acer is best known for its award-winning laptop computers. In Europe, the Middle East and Africa, Acer coordinates sales among a dozen national subsidiaries throughout its region, each using different back-office applications and procedures to manage operations. Because business practices vary by country, the differing systems and reporting processes were of little help to Acer's EMEA management team in efficiently forecasting and reviewing the business of the region as a whole.

During month-end, users were spending 5-7 days gathering information from various back-office systems, converting currencies and presenting data in a uniform manner to the management team. Acer EMEA wanted to unify its business operations within a single system, but at the same time preserve familiar back-office applications to ease the transition for users. The new system needed to provide management with comprehensive and timely information to make better business decisions.

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— Howard Cheung, CIO, Acer EMEA

Solution

Acer evaluated a number of vendors to build its order management system. Acer selected Novell based on previous positive experiences with Novell in other Acer business units, and because the productivity offered by the visual development environment of Novell exteNd would help the company meet its short time-to-market objectives. Using Novell exteNd, the company could rapidly repurpose existing back-office systems, unify its operations and improve customer service.

“Critical business changes prompted us to rethink our whole operations,” says Howard Cheung, CIO of Acer EMEA. “We needed an information architecture that could be deployed quickly to support critical business changes. We felt that a services-oriented strategy would deliver short-term returns and give us a solid foundation for the future.”

In six months, Novell consultants and Acer created a customized J2EE- and XML-based Order Management System (OMS) using Novell exteNd. The OMS architecture leverages two Novell exteNd Composer servers for integrating systems: one for centralizing and synchronizing information flow among Acer's disparate back-office installations, and another to service all user information requests. The OMS also uses the content management and presentation capabilities of Novell exteNd Director for all user-facing application components, giving users personalized Web-based views of information. To ensure optimal scalability and fault tolerance, the OMS runs on the Novell exteNd J2EE-compatible Application Server. The OMS is also interoperable with any EDI or XML electronic business messages, facilitating communication with suppliers.

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Each national subsidiary of Acer EMEA now has centralized access to product information across the region, as well as to key order processing functions, including product introductions, sales order processing and vendor order processing. The new system

The Acer EMEA portal gives users real-time, centralized access to product and sales information.



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reduces the level of manual work required for data entry, which has greatly improved order accuracy and efficiency. Executives now receive consistent, timely metrics on the performance of each subsidiary, as well as a consolidated view of the business, to make decisions based on varying market conditions.

“Our business managers can now access product, sales and market information almost on a real-time basis,” said Cheung. “They also have a more unified, customized view of information so they can stay focused on what is important to them.”

Looking forward, the new system is also a platform to deliver future Acer EMEA business initiatives, including customer self-service order placement, self-service order status inquiry and fully electronic order processing, via either EDI or XML.

“We needed to stop thinking about point-level approaches to addressing complex information management problems,” said Cheung. “Our vision was to implement a services-oriented information architecture that fulfils our short-term business requirements, while giving us the flexibility to pursue future business and technology alternatives.”

Results

Using Novell exteNd, Acer EMEA created a Web services-based order management system that unified its business operations and has improved overall operating efficiency. With access to centralized data across the region, Acer EMEA can be more responsive to both customers and suppliers, and executives can make more informed decisions based on timely business metrics from each country.

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Acer has reduced operating costs by eliminating manual errors and by standardizing communication with its suppliers, which shortens supplier lead time and increases the flexibility to work with suppliers that can provide the best service and price. As business needs change, Acer EMEA can easily extend the OMS and rapidly integrate other systems.

“With the help of Novell, we went from conceptual design to full deployment, beating our aggressive schedule times in the process,” said Cheung. “Now our Web Services application can take us in any of several different directions. Novell exteNd has more than met our current technology challenges, and has also positioned us to move quickly and flexibly in the future.” **N**

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The Web services-based order management system unifies business operations across the region.

ACER EMEA ORDER MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

