Wanted: Real-Time Inventory Visibility

A chemical manufacturer's need for an integrated wireless data collection application yields nearly $400,000 for integrator Catalyst Consulting Services, Inc.

Customers of Catalyst Consulting Services, Inc. (Newtown, PA) can't keep their mouths shut, which is fine with Michael Godshall, the company's president. "Our customers frequently give presentations to the Americas SAP [Newtown Square, PA] users' group [ASUG] about solutions we've delivered in the past," he said. "That's how Rohm and Haas Company [Philadelphia] heard about us."

Rohm and Haas is a $6 billion manufacturer of specialty chemicals with 140 research and manufacturing locations in 27 countries. The company was upgrading its SAP ERP (enterprise resource planning) system to version 4.6C and wanted a native SAP wireless data collection solution to achieve global, real-time inventory visibility. "They were using stand-alone legacy data collection applications [i.e. warehouse management system, inventory locator system, and shop floor control system]," Godshall explains. "The data gathered from these applications was being manually input into the SAP system. Furthermore, the wireless bar code scanners and handheld computers they were using were being discontinued."

In September 2001, Rohm and Haas contacted Godshall's company about this project. Catalyst is a mySAP.com Services Partner with ten years of SAP R/3 consulting and integration experience. Catalyst started phase one of the installation process in December 2001.

Sell The Advantages Of Telnet
Phase one of the project involved the 12 sites that had previously worked with the legacy wireless applications. Catalyst designed a new data collection application that integrated directly with the SAPConsole application. Part of this integration included the Georgia SoftWorks (GSW) (Dawsonville, GA) Telnet Server software. "GSW is the primary telnet software we sell because it can service nearly 800 users from one server," says Godshall. "We especially like the session monitoring feature of the GSW product, because it enables support personnel to view exactly what is on a user's handheld screen, thereby making troubleshooting easier." Without telnet, Rohm and Haas would have needed wireless middleware and additional servers to handle its large volume of users. Middleware typically requires a local server for validation of the data collection. Furthermore, with middleware, the client typically pays for software licenses at each site. Using the GSW/Catalyst solution, Rohm and Haas didn't incur any extra software license fees or the costs associated with additional servers. (Rohm and Haas already had a server in each location that was dedicated for the GSW software.)

Catalyst sold and installed Intermec Technologies (Everett, WA) MobileLAN 802.11b wireless LANs at each location. Catalyst also sold Intermec 2425 handheld computers (using Intermec batteries) for use as wireless data collectors. The customer purchased an extra support contract for the telnet software and a battery maintenance program. The initial cost of the project was approximately $400,000.

Integrate With ERP To Offer Long-Term Savings
"All of the customer's wireless transactions are now part of their SAP environment, so when they upgrade in the future, their long-term cost of ownership will be reduced," states Godshall. In addition to real-time inventory and warehouse management, Rohm and Haas now has a library of Catalyst-developed transactions for areas such as shop floor, plant maintenance, and quality management. Subsequent phases of the project involved adding returnable container tracking and product verification applications. Catalyst also had to translate the applications into Italian, German, and French. "Once they have one of these applications installed at any location, they can roll it out to any number of other locations with no additional software costs aside from SAP licensing fees," says Godshall.

Catalyst has completed 18 sites so far, incorporating 100 end users. The integrator continues to roll out this solution to Rohm and Haas facilities around the globe.