

Central Power Systems

Central Power Systems Goes "Live" with Persona

"We had acquired several companies and were migrating from an AS/400 to an OpenVMS platform," said Matthew Finn, Vice President of Operations for Central Power Systems in Columbus, Ohio. "As we moved off of the AS/400, we put customer information on the Internet basically with a static web page to replace the dial-up connectivity we had with the AS/400. That meant our customers weren't able to get the interactivity that they were used to, which brought up the question, 'what's the best extranet solution for us?'"

Finn's responsibilities include supervision of Central Power Systems' information systems operations, including interaction with warehouse operations, in addition to marketing and other duties.

BACKGROUND

Established in 1945, Central Power Systems is a wholesale distributor of lawn & garden parts and equipment serving companies in the Midwest and Southeast U.S. through a distribution network of more than 5,000 retailing outlets. The Central Power Systems customer base includes companies ranging from small lawn & garden repair shops to large mass-merchants. Central Power Systems has recently reinforced its distribution network through acquisition.

Central Power Systems' computing environment includes a Novell WAN, Digital OpenVMS, and Microsoft NT with Citrix MetaFrame. Its total number of extranet users is approximately 500, comprising a wide range of operating systems, browser versions, and hardware.

CHALLENGES

"We were looking for a solution that was easy to roll out and worked with a variety of different operating systems," said Finn. "We didn't want to spend a lot of development time on the extranet. We wanted to get started quickly with the core of our extranet, and then build around it. Pricing was important, too. And we didn't want to have to buy individual licenses for all 500 seats; just the number who were on our site at one time."



Finn added, "We started looking into products on the market, including Persona. We got a demo, had it up and running in 15 minutes, and said 'this is the one for us.' Technical support was able to answer all our questions very well and, after some basic testing, we decided to adopt Persona Insight with 50 concurrent licenses as our extranet solution. The 'out-of-the-box' Persona solution does virtually everything we need. Other than some screen customising, we haven't even varied much from the basic install."

SOLUTIONS AND BENEFITS

Using Persona as an extranet solution, Central Power Systems launched "LIVE!" - a secure, "customers-only" extranet site within the corporate web site. Now customers can interactively check stock, place orders,

track shipments, and check backorder status have access to the system 24 hours a day, seven days a week. "Orders can go straight through to one of our distribution centers and leave the warehouse from there," said Finn.

CENTRAL POWER SYSTEMS HAS REALISED BENEFITS INCLUDING

Ease of use: "The small Java file downloads, the customer launches IE or Netscape, and that's it. We didn't want our customers to have to go through any heavy configuration, or have our sales people have to go out and set up anything. We wanted it to be as transparent as possible, and Persona gives us that. It's very flexible and easy to use," according to Finn.

COST-EFFECTIVENESS

"We looked at total cost of ownership - including the time and costs involved in setting up the extranet solution. With Persona you simply install it, re-boot the server, and you're done. It's quick, there's very little overhead, and it's not a heavy client our customers have to install or download. 'LIVE!' literally went from the discussion stage to a reality in a very short time," said Finn.

IMPROVED CUSTOMER SERVICE

"We're not open on the weekend, but lawn & garden shops do most of their business on the weekend," Finn noted. "Without the extranet, we'd come in Monday to an onslaught of phone message or hundreds of faxes that we'd have to key in. Now 'LIVE!' gives dealers access so they can order the parts they need right away when their customers come in, and the dealer knows it's in the warehouse, ready to ship Monday morning."

"Our customers are really happy to have the kind of access that Persona provides. Now we're able to offer a '24/7' presence, which is a big benefit to our customers," said Finn.



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