



IBM Customer Reference

Conforama

Synopsis:

A large French household products retailer expects to reduce application maintenance costs and improve customer satisfaction and business processes by implementing IBM WebSphere Portal Extend to provide a unified view across back-end applications and an integrated framework for creation of a dynamic workplace

Location:

Lognes, France

Industry:

Retail

Focus Area:

e-business infrastructure

URL:

<http://www.conforama.fr>

Customer Background:

A subsidiary of the Pinault-Printemps-Redout Group, Conforama is a retailer of furniture and home electronics. With 45 affiliated companies, Conforama has approximately 200 stores located throughout the world, including 135 stores located in France and 27 stores operated overseas. In 2000, Conforama had an annual turnover of €2.1 billion, and the organization employs more than 10,000.

Business Need:

Conforama displays its household products in retail stores where customers can touch and feel items for sale. When they're ready to make a purchase, customers work with a sales representative to make final selections and arrange for delivery. The customer service representative launches applications to check availability and price and to create and print purchase orders.

Conforama has a diverse mix of back-end programs involved in the sales process. These include Oracle applications, applications that were developed with 4GL (an IBM Informix tool on an Informix database) and others that are hosted on an IBM AS/400 system. Due to this heterogeneous infrastructure, systems management is highly complex, making it difficult to fully integrate all the applications and maintain each of the different technologies.

With so many disjointed applications running at once, customer service was slow and inefficient, impacting customer satisfaction. To improve sales staff efficiency, provide better customer service and integrate all of its business applications through a single interface, Conforama decided to rewrite old applications to make them compatible with a robust portal framework. Conforama felt renewing its applications would help:

- Improve sales staff productivity, speeding the sales process and freeing sales representatives to spend more time with customers
- Provide a more accurate, comprehensive view of customer purchasing history so that services and promotions could be better targeted to individual needs
- Reduce application maintenance fees by simplifying administration.

As it encountered strong competition to its core business, Conforama felt it was critical to address these needs immediately.

Solution:

To create a framework to host its renewed business applications, Conforama selected IBM WebSphere Portal Extend, Version 4. By providing a unified, personalized view across disparate back-end applications, systems and processes, WebSphere Portal Extend will help speed and improve customer service representatives' routine tasks. When the final solution is implemented with Java 2 Enterprise Edition (J2EE) technology from IBM Rational, in-store employees will be able to use the Click 2 action feature of the portal to quickly access multiple customer or product views with a single mouse click. The portal will allow employees to easily retrieve the latest product information, sales aids and business tools like order entry applications.

Using WebSphere Portal Extend, Conforama plans to integrate all of its old applications within a unified framework, streamlining processes such as data retrieval, printing and data management. The underlying portal and J2EE technology is expected to improve application maintenance and simplify development of new interfaces. WebSphere Portal Extend will be centrally managed on an IBM eServer pSeries server. In the event of network failure, Conforama plans to use a cold backup for each store that will enable data retrieval, business continuity and continued customer service.

Implementation of the portal is Conforama's first step toward developing a dynamic workplace where all business processes can be accessed and performed in an integrated fashion. The final solution will allow employees to automatically get the dynamic information they need, quickly execute business processes across business applications and collaborate with other portal users. Once all of its old applications are unified through WebSphere Portal Extend, Conforama will start redeveloping applications using IBM Rational XDE Modeler, a tool based on J2EE technology. Conforama chose the WebSphere Portal Extend solution because it provided a comprehensive platform with leading-edge development capabilities. The portal technology supports the retailer's future requirements for J2EE application development as it delivers on the critical promise of providing excellent customer service in today's competitive business environment.

Benefits of the Solution:

As Conforama develops its new application and portal environment, it anticipates improved staff productivity as well as:

- Reduced costs for application maintenance
- Improved business processes through an integrated interface that speeds and simplifies interaction with backend applications
- Faster customer service, resulting in improved customer satisfaction
- Enhanced business continuity through a secure backup and recovery system that will be used in the event of a disaster.