IBM

Cramo strengthens customer relationships with WebSphere software.

Overview

■ **Challenge**

Cramo needed to offer customers the ability to review products and services on the Web in real time or risked losing market share

■ **Why Become an On Demand Business?**

Refine and streamline business processes in order to provide customers with higher levels of service and maintain competitive advantage

■ **Solution**

Integrated B2B extranet providing product and pricing information, financial statistics and other services to employees and customers

■ **Key Benefits**

Faster, more efficient customer service without having to add additional staff; seamless integration with legacy system; reduced development costs

Cramo's new Web site allows customers to choose from a large assortment of machinery and equipment for rent.

Sometimes, there's just no quick way to explain your company's products and services to a customer. This can be doubly true if you are a rental company like Cramo AB, whose customers often require a tremendous amount of detail in order to make a leasing decision.

Cramo (*www.cramo.com*) is one of northern Europe's leading rental groups, with operations throughout Scandinavia, Benelux and the Baltic Sea region. The 900-person company rents building machinery, construction equipment and portable buildings through more than 180 service and sales depots.

"Our customers were just a phone call away from the competition. We had to find a more responsive way to match their needs with our products and services."

—Hans Konig, Chief Information Officer, Cramo AB

ON **DEMAND BUSINESS**™

On Demand Business Benefits

- Cramo has transformed its business processes for superior efficiency, enabling it to respond to customers more quickly without having to increase its employee base
- Standards-based IT infrastructure enables support for future business growth

"WebSphere and DB2 running on the iSeries provide us with an open and scalable platform that delivers both high performance and 24/7 reliability. By using these products, we can provide our customers with all of the information they need — when and where they need it."

– Hans Konig

Cramo's business customers — mostly big construction firms, manufacturing plants and public institutions — do not make rental decisions quickly. "Renting a piece of heavy equipment is not the same as renting a sports car for the weekend," says Hans Konig, chief information officer. "Our customers are very interested in product information, capacity and performance versus economy. If they don't do their homework ahead of time, it can take forever to complete the rental agreement."

And not only is the equipment itself complicated to rent, the rental agreement itself also requires careful thought. Consider a large factory seeking to rent multiple types of equipment simultaneously, with each item priced differently or leased for different lengths of time. Sorting all of this out at the customer service desk can be extremely time-consuming.

Accordingly, Cramo was distressed to discover bottlenecks at its depots. Long lines were standard, and when customers tried calling, the same delays happened. Customers waited on hold, and when they finally were served, the customers in the store had to wait for the clerk to get off the phone.

Ranked number one in the equipment rental business in the Nordic region, Cramo had its market share to protect. Since customers were complaining about the long waits, Cramo envisioned its leading industry position slipping away if it didn't address the situation immediately. "Our customers were just a phone call away from the competition," says Konig. "We had to find a more responsive way to match their needs with our products and services."

The company wanted to empower business customers and consumers with all of the rental information they needed — before they arrived at an outlet. Cramo is a lean organization, and it did not want to solve the problem by hiring additional staff. Therefore, the company needed to find an inexpensive and efficient way to present its product and service information 24/7.

"We wanted to provide not just detailed rental inventories and descriptions but key financial data as well, such as order histories and outstanding balances," says Konig. "It was clear to us that we needed to transform the way we were doing business, or risk dissatisfying — and losing — our customers."

New online solution positions Cramo as an industry thought leader

Solving the problem for Cramo involved transforming not only its business processes but also the infrastructure supporting them. Cramo worked closely with IBM Business Partner Adcore and IBM Global Services to develop an online business-to-business (B2B) system that provides real-time access to product data and availability, billing information and current rates. With this information, customers can make their decisions and initiate an order, before they reach the rental counter — thus speeding up the transaction process and saving Cramo from increasing its employee base.

Now, business customers can go to the Web and answer their own questions about their balances, view ongoing orders, access their own negotiated prices and view their rental agreements — all of which make for less routine, time-consuming work for the rental store clerks. In addition, customers can create their own user-management rules to enable their employees to access the system. The general public has 24/7 access to an up-to-date list of everything Cramo has to offer, with detailed information on technical features, accessories, prices, availability and more.

Using the system's rich functionality, customers can even configure special rental options, mixing and matching items such as bulldozers, scaffolding and modular spaces. Then they can make a printout of the configuration and present it to a depot clerk for immediate processing.

WebSphere powers new B2B extranet

Cramo's B2B extranet is based on the WebSphere software family. The company created its new customer-facing Web applications with IBM WebSphere Studio Application Developer, while IBM WebSphere Application Server acts as the runtime engine for the Java™ technology-based business logic components. In addition, Cramo uses IBM WebSphere Edge Server for load balancing and backup functions.

IBM DB2 Universal Database, running on an IBM @server iSeries 825 system, serves as the backend information management system for Cramo's extensive inventory list of rental equipment. Cramo also runs IBM DB2 Universal Database for Windows, in parallel, on Intel processor-based systems. In addition, Cramo uses a third-party content management solution, which runs on an IBM Lotus Domino server. "There are a number of features with Domino that provide high stability and availability," says Konig. "These capabilities are very important to us."

Key Components

Software

- IBM WebSphere® Application Server
- IBM WebSphere Studio Application Developer
- IBM WebSphere Edge Server
- IBM DB2® Universal Database™ for Windows®
- IBM DB2 Connect™
- IBM Lotus® Domino™

Servers

- IBM @server iSeries™

Services

- IBM Global Services

Business Partner

- Adcore

To access its existing DB2 database, Cramo uses DB2 Connect. This is a key function, as the legacy database contains not only critical customer order histories going back several years, but also a wealth of information on equipment, machinery and other rental products. By connecting the two databases, Cramo can leverage its existing investment while planning for the future.

"WebSphere and DB2 running on the iSeries provide us with an open and scalable platform that delivers both high performance and 24/7 reliability," says Konig. "By using these products, we can provide our customers with all of the information they need—when and where they need it."

Cramo strengthens customer relationships

The project is still being rolled out, but the results from the pilot program have been impressive. The seven stores selected to use the pilot have had positive comments for the new extranet site, praising its ease of use and high functionality. Customers are fast-tracking themselves on product and service questions ahead of time, so the solution is on track to shorten the lines at the depot. Cramo estimates that the new system will slash the rental process times by 50 percent.

Cramo is confident that the new solution will not only strengthen its relationships with customers, but also help it reduce its operating costs by lowering the amount of time clerks spend with each customer.

"Our IBM On Demand Business solution allows both consumers and business customers to do much of the preliminary work themselves, freeing depot staff for other responsibilities," says Konig. "Previously, they would have had to stand at the counter and go through all of the various options with one of our staff members. And that's after they had to stand in line for 20 minutes while the guy ahead of them did the same thing."

Moving forward, the company plans to add a new procurement system, which will run on the iSeries platform. It also plans to add e-commerce functionality to allow customers to pay for their rentals online. Cramo expects that development costs will be reduced from re-use of programming components and skills developed over the course of the initial project. Cramo also intends to stay within its IT budget, thanks to the flexible pricing plan from IBM Global Financing.

"With the new WebSphere-based solution, Cramo has established itself as a thought leader in the equipment rental industry by using technology to become more responsive to our customers," says Konig. "It has allowed us to be much more aggressive in terms of how we compete in the marketplace, and that will continue to help us as we grow our business."