

LANSA Case Study

Carole Fabrics trims time with LANS Commerce Edition

Carole Fabrics, Inc., a Hunter Douglas company located in Augusta, Georgia, in the USA, manufactures custom draperies, bedspreads, window coverings and other quality home decorations. Carole used LANS Commerce Edition to provide its customers with online order entry and inquiry, including a Web-based Configurator for custom orders. The Web solution integrates with Carole's MAPICS solution.

Steve Cooke, MIS manager at Carole Fabrics, says, "LANSA Commerce Edition has all the base functions and security we need and also provides a powerful development tool for building functionality specific to our company. Previously over 40 percent of our custom orders could not be completed without calling the decorator. We cut about two days off our delivery time by getting the order right the first time."

Reducing Expensive Delays

Carole Fabrics' customers include large department store chains, home decoration shops, design studios and freelance designers working from home. Brand names include Carole Fabrics, Tapestry, Van Roberts Upholstery and Con-Fab. Carole receives close to one thousand orders per day. The orders are a mix of cut fabric, fabric swatches, sample books and custom orders.

"Over 40 percent of the custom orders could not be made without us calling the decorator and finding out more information, often adding several days to our delivery time," says Cooke.

"We had seven people in our call center that proofread and processed orders. They required extensive product knowledge to read the order and visualize the completed product to fully understand what the decorator wants. Even with experience cutting or sewing in our plant, training took six to twelve months."

"Mistakes can be expensive, especially if you have already cut the fabric. We don't want to stop in the middle of an order and call the customer for clarification, or throw away \$500 of fabric because of miscommunication. We have a few hundred people in our workshop and need to keep orders moving."

"We didn't want to build a Web site from scratch, so we looked at several tools. What we liked about the LANS Commerce Edition solution is that we got the flexibility of a development tool combined with ready-to-use comprehensive eCommerce functionality and built-in security."

Rapid Integration with MAPICS

Fabric swatch and other yardage orders are straightforward



"We did the whole project in about two man-weeks spread over about a six-week period."

and fit well in the standard order entry model. So, this was the first area Carole automated over the Web by providing online stock inquiry, order tracking and ordering of fabric yardage. With hundreds of yardage orders per day, call center traffic could be immediately reduced.

LANSA Commerce Edition provides online order tracking directly from MAPICS, regardless of whether the orders arrived by fax, phone or electronically.

"Although the Web solution shows data directly from our ERP system, it was essential that we didn't have a direct connection to the Internet. We used LANS's Edge Server configuration, with a Windows IIS Server in front of our network to access our iSeries. This setup gives high security with minimal network traffic," says Cooke.

The custom orders were more problematic as taking specifics for measurements, style, lining, hem size and lots of other variations are difficult to automate. Carole uses a question-and-answer script they created with MAPICS' Knowledge Base Configurator that is written in PL1 and cannot be modified, or ported to the Web. With over ten thousand questions/answers and over fifteen thousand business rules, maintaining two systems was unthinkable. Carole decided to write and modularize its own Configurator engine, but to retain the same MAPICS file structure.

Next came the task of making the Configurator available on the Web. Cooke and his team developed the RPG engine and APIs to feed questions, allowed answers and default options to the LANS for the Web application and



to receive answers. The moment a customer clicks the place order button, the system creates a live order in MAPICS using the MAPICS offline load interface and assigns a reference number.

The Configurator manages a question-and-answer dialogue. The first question is what product. When you answer, for example, drapery, it will lead you through a series of drapery-related questions, then it gives you a choice of suitable linings and a list of options you can choose from, such as banding and trim. Each question is based on the previous answer.

"It's simple to use and won't let the user answer the wrong question," says Cooke.

When all the questions are answered, the system creates the bill of materials, prices the order, prints the work tickets immediately and sends a confirmation email to the customer.

The Configurator was first used by call center staff and drastically reduced the training time of call center operators and eliminated most of the proofing process. "We can now hire somebody off the street. All they have to do is read the script, ask the questions and key in the answers," explains Cooke.

After a period of internal fine-tuning, a retailer with several hundred decorators successfully piloted the Web solution. Now all of Carole's customers can create and check orders from their own desk.

"Integration with MAPICS was straight forward," says Cooke. "We just made the MAPICS files and fields known to LANSA."

"Since we are such a small shop, we asked LANSA consultants to handle the Web development while we concentrated on our business APIs. We met in the middle and it worked well."

"We did the whole project in about two man-weeks spread over about a six-week period," says Cooke.



Carole Fabrics has served the U.S. custom decorating industry since 1960 and takes pride in its reputation of quality, fashion and service.

Company and System Information

- Carole Fabrics, Inc., headquartered in Augusta, Georgia, USA, has served the custom decorating industry since 1960 and takes pride in its reputation of quality, fashion and service. Carole's national workroom, distribution centers, customer service facilities and showrooms comprise over 250,000 square feet. For more information visit: www.carolefabrics.com
- Carole Fabrics uses an IBM iSeries model 810 for its production and development application server environments and a DELL server running Windows 2000 with IIS as the Web server.
- The LANSA solution integrates with Carole Fabrics' highly customized version of MAPICS. The system has 200 internal users.

Getting it Right the First Time

"LANSA Commerce Edition has all the base functions and security we needed for our B2B solution, while also providing a powerful development tool to extend and customize functionality specific to our company. Our Configurator and complex custom orders could easily be customized with LANSA, allowing us to re-use existing logic and programs," says Cooke.

"We cut about two days off our delivery time by getting the order right the first time."

"We cut about two days off our delivery time by getting the order right the first time. We are proud to be one of the best companies in the custom decorating industry. This LANSA solution is another tool we can use to help us stay there."

"Staff who used to spend their time proofreading orders and making phone calls to clarify orders are now productive in other areas of the company."

"Our customers have more control. We get half a dozen new customers each day signing up for the Web and we haven't even advertised the site yet. The 24x7 availability is especially appreciated by our one-man shop designers and home decorators. They can go out to meet their clients all day and work on their orders in the evening."

"What we like about LANSA is that everything on our Web site is done in real time down to the second, without duplicating data. From the moment an order is placed, its progress can be tracked online. The moment a cutter cuts a piece of fabric in the workroom, stock availability is updated."

"Likewise, when marketing comes up with a new product or fabric, we add the details and formulas to the Configurator data file and a link to the marketing collateral and it is immediately available for purchase on the Web," says Cooke.

Mobile Phone Access

"We now want to extend the Web solution with cell phone access, so decorators can access the system while visiting client's homes. You can't drag a laptop into someone's home and get their daughter to unplug from the Internet, so you can check stock availability," explains Cooke.

"We also receive hundreds of orders for fabric swatches each day. People like to feel and touch fabrics, so the Web is never going to replace real samples, but we need to make the process more efficient. Instead of printing a pick ticket, we will send the information to a screen in the cutting room, get the fabric cut, scan the fabric tag, print a shipping label and drop it in an envelope."

"LANSA provides a powerful development tool to extend our ERP functionality and has already proven its ability to meet our ongoing business challenges and requirements," concludes Cooke.

The Americas:
Headquarters – Chicago, USA
Tel: +1 630 874 7000
Email: info@lansa.com

Europe:
Headquarters – London, UK
Tel: +44 1727 790300
Email: info@lansa.co.uk

Asia Pacific:
Headquarters – Sydney, Australia
Tel: +61 2 8907 0200
Email: info@lansa.com.au

www.lansa.com

LANSA
ADVANCED SOFTWARE MADE SIMPLE