LANSA Case Study

Piraeus MultiFin improves competitiveness with LANSA

Piraeus MultiFin SA, based in Athens, Greece, is one of the country's leading finance companies for the automotive, motorcycle and marine sectors, both in retail and stock financing. Piraeus MultiFin used Visual LANSA Framework to redevelop its core line-of-business system, transforming it from a green screen legacy interface to a modern Web application. The system provides secure Web access to over 400 car dealerships and numerous customers, collection partners and other stakeholders.

George Drakos, Managing Director at MultiFin, says, "Our customers, staff and external stakeholders all benefit from the system's productive user interface, improved functionality and easy Web access. The system has reduced the time it takes from application to approval, making us more competitive. We have improved customer service and lowered our operating cost structure and achieved all this with modest resources and our own small team of two LANSA developers."

Challenging Times

Piraeus MultiFin (MultiFin) is a member of the international Piraeus Bank Group, one of the most dynamic and active financial organizations in Greece, with over 350 branches in Greece and more than 500 branches in South Eastern Europe and Egypt.

MultiFin's main business is in the automotive industry, with smaller operations in the motorcycle and small vessels industries.

Although 2009 was a very challenging year for the asset finance market, MultiFin managed to be profitable and improve its relationships with customers and other stakeholders. 2010 may prove to be even more challenging, but MultiFin feels well prepared.

Mr Drakos explains, "In a business where you cannot differentiate by price, providing good customer service and keeping your costs down become the two major driving factors for success. Our IT systems help us to continually improve in both and we view our investment in technology a key element in building a sustainable competitive advantage."

On the establishment of the company in 1998, MultiFin selected LANSA as its development tool, the main reasons being LANSA's development productivity, short learning curve, repository-based architecture and proven stability.

From 2000 onwards, dealer partners and collection partners

IT team, left to right: Gakis Karageorgas, Dimitris Karanikolas, George Gerakis, Panagiotis Zaxariadis. Seated: Costas Kelaidis, Zana Tzia.

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were provided with interactive Web access, developed with LANSA for the Web. However, MultiFin's internal users were still using the traditional 5250 system, originating from the nineties.

The system served the company well, but as time went by, the legacy green screen user interface became unpopular. In addition to providing a more user friendly and productive user interface, MultiFin also wanted to modernize its systems with better email and Microsoft Office integration, plus real-time integration with external business partners.

When MultiFin needed to deliver major new functionality to its system, the company decided the timing was right to upgrade its development environment to Visual LANSA Framework, both for the delivery of new functionality and for the redevelopment of the existing system.

"We were used to LANSA's productivity in the traditional development environment, especially its template and repository features, and could see that Visual LANSA Framework's prototyping capabilities could take that productivity even further. We also felt that the framework development approach would result in consistent program quality and disciplined development standards," says **Gakis Karageorgas**, IT Manager at MultiFin.

The Modernization Project

MultiFin is well on its way to redeveloping its entire 5250 core system, roughly consisting of 1,500 programs, to modern Web applications. At the time of this case study, the Collection and Financial stock modules were already fully converted and implemented. Over 60 percent of the Loan and Commercial modules have been redeveloped, while the General Ledger module will be modernized last, possibly using LANSA's RAMP phased modernization rather than full redevelopment with Visual LANSA.

A critical issue that came up during the project was the need to deliver new functionality for the existing 5250 system, alongside development of the new graphical system. To minimize duplication of development effort, MultiFin made use of LANSA's complete segregation of the user interface

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and business logic by defining the business rules in the LANSA Repository and the technique of including common code in both the old and new system.

A major difference between the old and new system is the usage pattern, according to Mr. Drakos. "In the old system, users were inclined to remain within the limited usage of their daily routine. It was not uncommon for users to request upgrades to the system that were already built in. The more welcoming nature of the Windows-based system encourages the user to explore the system's potential."

"Users are particularly happy with the easy search and multitasking features and tight integration with MS Office, enabling them to directly send email and work with PDF, Word and Excel files, without having to leave the core system. Integration with MS Office has never been so simple," says Mr. Karageorgas.

Improved Workflow

The new system helped to improve the workflow between MultiFin's internal departments as well as with external parties, such as dealers.

"The dealer site provides direct secure access to MultiFin's data and applications, allowing for effective communication with customers and sales points. Also, having a Web presence in the dealer's showroom makes MultiFin more approachable in the eyes of the customer," says Mr. Drakos.

"The dealers' ability to input a loan application directly into the system has reduced the time measured from application to approval, thus boosting our competitiveness. At the same time, it has reduced administrative costs, because it now takes less effort to input and process a potential retail customer."

By moving the responsibility for data quality directly to the source, there has been a sharp decrease in errors and misunderstandings. Previously MultiFin staff had to enter the loan application, with all the delays and inaccuracies associated with paper forms and rekeying of data. Now staff are automatically alerted regarding new applications and the next step that needs to be taken.

The Web interface allows dealers to monitor the loan's completion process until disbursement, thus reassuring them that all is done in a timely fashion. The process cuts costs for both MultiFin and its dealers, as it reduces the number of enquiry phone calls.

Once the loan is complete, the system's integrated document management facility ensures fast paperless exchange of legal documents.

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Other external stakeholders benefit from direct Web access as well. These include the bank's risk and Basel II teams, both of which are in constant need of information. "The system helps to reduce the amount of time our staff need to spend communicating this information," says Mr. Drakos.

MultiFin's collection agencies also have Web access to the system. MultiFin can assign cases for collection to the appropriate agency and monitor the progress and quality of the work they perform.

Last but not least, MultiFin's sales and audit team members on the road also have Web access, making their customer visits more effective.

Everyone Benefits

Mr. Karageorgas feels that it has been very important to the success of the project that the application transformation was achieved by MultiFin's own small IT team. LanSoft, a LANSA partner in Greece, provided training and technical assistance, but the actual redevelopment was done by just two of MultiFin's developers.

"LANSA provided the tools and training to make this project a success using very few resources. With Visual LANSA Framework, a small team of just two developers managed to deliver roughly 1,000 programs, while also being responsible for the continuous maintenance and improvement of the existing system. The framework's standard MS Outlook-style user interface, easy prototyping and evolutionary development and deployment cycle made this possible," concludes Mr. Karageorgas.

"Our customers, staff and external stakeholders all benefit from the system's productive user interface, improved functionality and easy Web access. Our IT team is excited about using LANSA's modern technology and feel more job satisfaction being able to support a sophisticated Web application that is used by both internal and external parties. Management is pleased because all of the above has been achieved with modest resources and has resulted in a lower operating cost structure," concludes Mr. Drakos.

Company and System Information

- Piraeus MultiFin operates in the area of financing the purchase of both new and used vehicles, as well as motorcycles and small vessels. The company works with more than 400 car dealerships, including several of the country's major dealers. For more information visit: www.piraeusbankgroup.com

- LanSoft is a LANSA business partner in Greece, specializing in application development for the IBM i platform, including systems for warehouse and inventory management, car leasing and supermarket retailers. For more information visit: www.lansoft.com.gr

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