

LANSA Case Study

Stone Wheel's e-marketplace never tires

Stone Wheel is a car parts distributor with 15 warehouses servicing over 2,500 independent repair shops in the American Mid-West. Repair shops within a five mile radius of a Stone Wheel distribution center can expect "hotshot orders" placed over the Web to be delivered within half an hour.

Sparkhorse, an Application Service Provider and LANSA business partner, hosts the LANSA Web application for Stone Wheel and other car parts distributors on its AS/400 in Atlanta. This LANSA e-marketplace integrates with DST/400, a Parts Distribution System from another LANSA business partner Distribution Service Technologies (DST) running on Stone Wheel's AS/400 in Chicago USA.

David Fiorello, Sales Manager at Stone Wheel, says, "Customers using the system have added almost one third to their volume. We have over 100,000 parts in 70 product lines and now that customers can see our full catalog on the Web, they can see items, that they didn't even know we had."



The Challenge

"Car part distribution is a fiercely competitive industry. And it is not just an issue of price, the real issue is the level of service", explains David. "When you bring your car to a repair shop, you want it back as soon as possible. The repair shop needs parts immediately. A few years ago they may have had parts worth \$25,000 on their shelves. But those days are gone. Today, because there are so many parts, they cannot stock them all."

"It is critical to get parts delivered as quickly as possible. We use our own vehicles and drivers and the bigger warehouses probably have 12 vehicles each. Two years ago we started what we called internally a PDQ (Pretty Darned Quick) delivery service. We offered fast service to customers within a three mile radius of a warehouse."

"Repair shops used to phone or fax their orders to us and this was not efficient for either party. There was a time when it was considered a great service to talk with a representative."

"But our customers are very knowledgeable and generally know which parts they want. Our service staff weren't really selling anything or adding value to the process. And our service lines were so busy we often had to put a customer call on hold."

"Our hotshot deliveries take half an hour at most. If we can't get it to you in half an hour, somebody else will."

"The market is very competitive and we wanted to extend the fast service guarantee to a five mile area. So we had to improve on the ordering process."

A fast AS/400 Web solution

Initially Stone Wheel offered a dial-in emulation interface to a handful of customers, but the system was not friendly enough. DST, who provided the original parts distribution system to Stone Wheel, partnered with Sparkhorse to provide Web-based parts ordering and inquiry.

Jim Slaba, Project Manager from Sparkhorse says, "Together with DST we investigated who in the marketplace could provide a Web solution for the AS/400 platform. The quick answer was LANSA. We considered other tools but they didn't go far enough in offering real Web navigation and behavior for AS/400 applications."

"We called on LANSA consulting and they did a tremendous job. We worked with LANSA on a one-week JAD (Joint Application Development) session. In that week we laid



out our business requirements, the screen flow and detailed specifications. In six weeks they built the application. We had a pilot implementation at a small group of Stone Wheel's customers, made some minor enhancements and have been rolling it out ever since."

"Anything that you can do on the Web, you can do with LANSA for the Web. LANSA integrates easily with the RPG system on the AS/400. The AS/400 is the platform of choice for a (large car parts) warehouse. A warehouse can easily have 100,000 to 200,000 parts. I cannot think of any other machine that can hold up like the AS/400."

Tom Lancour, IT manager at Stone Wheel agrees. "The AS/400 is a work horse platform. It is always up, highly scalable and a fast Web server."

Web ordering saves time

David Fiorello says, "Web-based parts ordering saves time on both sides. It is a lot quicker for the repair shops, because they don't have to wait on the phone for an available service representative. And if you don't know what part you need, you can search for it in the catalog by year, make and model."

Ethen Fuller, from Fullers Service Center in Chicago, a customer of Stone Wheel agrees. "It is a lot faster than dialing customer service on the phone and there is less risk of someone writing down the wrong part number. I have a

parts driver myself and send him back and forth to Stone Wheel all day. The trip takes my driver less than 30 minutes. I typically send my driver first and then start punching in my order. By the time my driver arrives at Stone Wheel, my order is processed and the package with the parts is waiting to be picked up. It's a great system!"

"Anything that you can do on the Web, you can do with LANSA for the Web."

"When the repair shop hits the OK-button, the order goes right to the printer in the warehouse," continues David. "There is no need for re-keying orders from faxes. We can take more orders, quicker and for a lower cost. Now we have more time for those orders that do require our expertise."

"A few weeks ago we demonstrated the Web system to a customer and entered a few of their orders. While we were still doing the demo, the parts were delivered. It was very impressive."

The Future

"Many repair shops have been buying from the same warehouse for years," says Lou Stover, Vice President of DST. "Like any relationship it is based on trust and we want to build software that reinforces that relationship, just as we respect LANSA as a company and trust their product to help us do this."

David Fiorello agrees, "While loyalty is based on the relationship, you have to stay on your toes, be competitive and keep your customers happy on a daily basis. Our hotshot deliveries take half an hour at most. If we cannot get it to you in half an hour, somebody else will. It is very competitive."

Max Wagerman, co-founder of Sparkhorse and a car aftermarket industry specialist, concludes, "As more and more companies go online, both distributors and repair shops are searching for easy to use technology that will make their shops more profitable. Sparkhorse meets that need with our car aftermarket e-marketplace. With the help of the AS/400 and LANSA we see parts lookup, online ordering, live connectivity to inventory and labor estimating functions as just the first step to take the lead in delivering eCommerce to the car aftermarket."



Timothy Renehan, Co-President, and David Fiorello, Sales Manager — StoneWheel.

Company and System Information

- Stone Wheel Inc. is part of the Unicor Automotive Marketing Group. Stone Wheel has 15 warehouses in the Mid West. Stone Wheel uses an AS/400 model 620 in Chicago connected via Frame Relay to the AS/400 at Sparkhorse in Atlanta.
- For more information visit: www.stonewheel.com
- DST Inc. is a premier IBM® and LANSA business partner based in Irvine, California. DST specializes in consulting and software for the automotive aftermarket.
- For more information visit: www.dstinc.com
- Sparkhorse, based in Atlanta, Georgia, specializes in eCommerce and technology solutions for the automotive aftermarket. The Web solution runs on an AS/400 model 720, dedicated to Application Service Provider clients.

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