

Bridge-x Connect for Distributor/Channel management

Summary

A global player in the industrial control and automation industry wanted to modernize its channel management processes.

Business Drivers

The company, a major manufacturer of industrial control and automation solutions, sells in North America and in the rest of the world through its large channel of distributors. In order to effectively manage their partner relationships, the company wanted to tightly align their internal engineering, sales and service teams with the distributors to best serve the needs of the market.

As a competitive strategy, the company had to make it easy for distributors to conduct business with them and offer incentives to improve their share of the business with the distributors.

Technology Drivers

The company wanted to replace and upgrade its decade-old distributor website infrastructure and implement a portal solution for smoothly orchestrating communication, collaboration and commerce with their distributors, with real-time integration to SAP CRM, SAP ERP and BW. Their older distributor management infrastructure was unable to fully make use of the new advances on the web (social media, message boards, product videos) as well as its more recent technology investments in ERP, CRM, data warehouses etc.

The portal-based channel management solution had to provide a rich, "Web 2.0" style user experience with seamless integration to backend systems and enable communication (email, chat), collaboration (sharing of sales opportunities, leads, activities, product information), commerce (order entry and shopping carts) and content management (to allow sharing and exchange of engineering drawings, factsheets etc).

The company's product line was complex and highly technical and required a high degree of customer support at all stages of sales and installation. To address this issue, the company decided to leverage innovations like technical product videos, online user communities, message boards and forums.

The company also wished to leverage the new channel management solution to offer a highly visual, intuitive product configurator that was fully integrated with their SAP ERP system. This would enable them to simplify and accelerate the "Quote-to-Order" process as well as understand the distributor's engineering challenges.

Key challenges

Distributor & end-customer data were present in disparate systems and spreadsheets. Therefore, to conceptualize, design and build a complex distributor management solution called for expertise in all layers of technology including the ability to visualize and harmonize a great user experience.

As this was an external-facing portal, user experience and data security were of critical importance.

Project objectives

- Build a one-stop portal for distributors and resellers to research the company's offerings, place sales orders, track shipments and returns, communicate with customer support and sales staff and get the latest product information and news.
- Highly customizable "Web 2.0"-style user interface with ability to personalize content based on user roles and function.
- Integration with SAP CRM, ERP and non-SAP data sources with no data duplication.
- Real-time updates to ERP and CRM
- Single Sign-on for users

Solution: Bridge-x Connect

The company selected Bridge-x Connect framework for the distributor portal. The solution was conceived and built using SAP Netweaver CE platform and Service-oriented Architecture.

Bridge-x Connect distributor portal provides highly personalized view to the user including information such as orders, shipments, backorders, pricing information, return material authorizations, sales leads and opportunities and sales analytics.

With Bridge-x Connect, the company's sales and service staff also communicate via chat, email and community forums. The portal also provides a rich, comprehensive content management system for managing product information.

The solution is fully integrated with SAP ERP, CRM and BW which allows both the distributor and the company's sales and support teams to view updates in real-time.

Solution implementation highlights

- Collaborative effort between Bridge-x and customer's teams
- Integration with SAP and non-SAP data sources
- From solution gap analysis to first wave of deployment in 4 months.
- Phased rollout of functionality, including content management and enhancements.

Key Benefits:

2-4x improvement in number of orders, inquiries and quotes.

Uptick in customer satisfaction metrics after portal launch.

Improved utilization and adoption of CRM/SFA system.