Specialist Crafts Ltd

Specialist Crafts Uses the Rocket CorVu Data Management Platform to Maximize Profits in a High-Volume Transactional Business Environment

Leicester, England-based Specialist Crafts Ltd supplies art and craft products to a broad range of educational establishments throughout the United Kingdom and the rest of the world, including primary schools, secondary schools, universities, occupational therapy departments, prisons and social service centers. It also owns several other internet brands that specialize in craft products to the end consumer. With more than 20,000 products, its catalogue is managed in consultation with educational advisors, department heads, technicians and crafters to ensure that its range is relevant to current curricular and market trends. Specialist Crafts was founded in 1910 and was originally called Dryad Handicrafts.

High-volume business requires real-time, enhanced data-analysis

For an online retailer such as Specialist Crafts, which sells a complete catalogue of art and craft supplies to schools and crafters throughout the United Kingdom and Ireland, the ability to track sales and analyze business patterns in real time is critical. Without intelligent data, it is virtually impossible to maximize profit, but a company with only 75 employees can't dedicate a great deal of time to data analysis without compromising its core operations.   For this reason, Andrew Skidmore, Systems Manager at Specialist Crafts, determined in 2012 that he needed to replace the company's old business intelligence tool, which he called "slow and cumbersome," with Rocket's Software's CorVu.

"We needed a much better software system for business intelligence in terms of speed and more robust reporting," Skidmore says. "CorVu has been very useful in terms of us being able to understand what we're selling and where, and also to present the information with the speed necessary for it to have value in a sales environment that is in daily flux."   CorVu understands the MultiValue structure of Rocket's UniData database, which is the technology underlying Sanderson's application. Understanding inventory and sales patterns was almost impossible before implementing CorVu.

Replacing tedium with automated report generation saves time and encourages data-utilization

The old system required Skidmore to query data and then manually enter the necessary information into spreadsheets - a process that took nearly 30 minutes for each daily report. With Rocket, Skidmore was impressed that his queries would create customized reports from the database within minutes.

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In an online business that depends on a high volume of small transactions to increase profits, it is critical to identify daily sales trends and optimize the catalogue presentation accordingly. In 2012, Specialist Crafts turned to Rocket Software partner Sanderson to turn its data into a strategic asset.

Rocket®

"There are lots of lines of info," Skidmore said. "We're talking about thousands of small-value transactions a day. With CorVu, the info comes to us in a user-friendly format within minutes. Everybody has access to the same information. And if you can get this sort of information to people in a couple of minutes, they'll use it."

The functionality that CorVu NG offers Specialist Crafts include desktop, web and mobile access; reading, merging, tabulating, transforming and analyzing data from multiple systems and locations; connectivity between LDAP/data directory and the platform's built-in security provider; deployment from any Java application server; web interface-based querying and report development; and geo-spatial mapping to determine regional sales patterns.

Identifying sales patterns within thousands of daily transactions drives profitability and growth

It is impossible to overstate the importance of data utilization in a business that depends on volume. For example, if Specialist Crafts is selling pens on different pages across several categories, (i.e. art materials and graphics), Mr. Skidmore needs to know where the sales are originating and then fine-tune his catalogue accordingly. "If you are looking at a figure, it means nothing without being able to break it down into its variable parts," he says. "With Rocket we can quickly and easily analyze the data by sub-categories and identify which pages on our store are profitable."

It is the sort of drill-down that CorVu provides, that enables growth as opposed to stagnation. "We split our catalogue into sections," Systems Manager Skidmore notes. "When we sell a quantity of a certain product, we'll break that down into market categories, such as materials and paper, and then into sub-categories like paint types, different brushes and kinds of paper. We'll then spot patterns of products and categories that pair well together.

"Until we had the ability to drill down, we didn't know where our sales came from. It was extremely hard for us to understand and use all of the information we had access to. With the sort of analysis we can get through CorVu, we can make informed decisions on how to sell different products and where to place them soe we can maximize the sales potential of each page on our store."

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