

Information Builders enables agile information solutions with business intelligence (BI) and integration technologies. WebFOCUS – the most widely utilized business intelligence platform – connects to any enterprise system or application and enables simple and intuitive interaction with information.

Roll Coater

Snapshot

Organization

Roll Coater (www.rollcoater.com), a division of ArvinMeritor that specializes in coil coating processes for the metals industry.

The Challenge

Replace a rigid customer service application with a robust extranet system that supplies online reporting with intelligent formatting and drill-down capabilities.

The Strategy

Create a Web-based reporting system that combines multiple back-end data sources into a single, browser-driven interface. Simplify access to information about orders, inventory, and shipping via a self-service extranet environment.

The Results

More reporting options and greater ease of use improves service to customers. Cohesive data access and reporting environment reduces programming costs. Self-service information system lightens the load on customer service reps.

Information Builders Solution

WebFOCUS, Information Builders' Consulting.

WebFOCUS Powers Industry-Leading Extranet

Roll Coater Enhances Customer Service, Reduces Costs With Self-Service Information System

Competition often drives innovation for IT professionals. At Roll Coater, a division of the \$8 billion manufacturing firm ArvinMeritor, Information Builders' technology is central to a new extranet application that is propelling the company to the forefront of its market.

Roll Coater is a world leader in coil coating, a value-added process for the metals industry. Unfinished metal coils roll through its receiving doors, and finished metal coils for everything from refrigerators to garage doors exit through the shipping department. With the largest U.S. metal manufacturers on one side of the value chain and the largest original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) on the other, Roll Coater needs to share information in a secure, consistent, and flexible way to meet high standards for service.



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“Our customers want to see information in many different ways, with a minimum of effort, so they can streamline their own business processes,” says Dave Prince, senior director of IT at Roll Coater. “When we realized that we needed to move ahead more quickly with our extranet capabilities, we contacted Information Builders for help.”

So began a new extranet project called CoilTrak™, which dramatically boosts Roll Coater’s online presence. WebFOCUS is at the heart of the new information system, providing internal and external customers with a variety of reports to assist with inventory management, shipping, billing, and order tracking.

WebFOCUS combines all the functionality of query tools, reporting tools, and online analytical processing (OLAP) into a single solution with one common interface. The business intelligence software has proven its ability to support 500 users. Already, it is streamlining information delivery and reducing costs associated with a variety of customer service tasks.

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Playing Catch-Up

Roll Coater’s old extranet application was built using ASP and Visual Basic. According to Prince, the system was limited in its capabilities and difficult to upgrade. “There were only three options regarding inventory and order status,” he says. “Data was available via EDI and there was some basic browser-based functionality.”

Prince and his colleagues went back to the drawing board to revamp their extranet system. They decided to start fresh with a more powerful reporting and application development environment. “We had been using WebFOCUS to create internal self-service applications, and had developed some solid expertise with the technology,” he recalls. “We quickly realized we could use WebFOCUS to enhance our external Web functionality as well, building on knowledge we already had in-house.”

The IT department was fully supported by the president of the company, Bob O’Neal, who believed the new system would help achieve his goal of being number one in the industry. “When he saw Information Builders could help us achieve that goal, he immediately authorized us to move forward with the WebFOCUS application,” Prince says.

Once the decision was finalized, Roll Coater contacted Information Builders’ Consulting for guidance with the project. “Information Builders helped us meet our deadlines and maximize our use of the WebFOCUS technology,” Prince says. “Bringing in Consulting was a win/win situation. They showed us the true power of WebFOCUS.”

With this guidance, Roll Coater had the new extranet ready in just five months. The architecture is straightforward yet effective. WebFOCUS resides on a pair of Microsoft Windows 2000 servers in a redundant configuration. Production-related data is replicated in real time from a Unisys mainframe system to a Microsoft SQL Server 2000 database, where it can be directly accessed by WebFOCUS via a Microsoft .NET application environment. “Our initial tests reveal that we have all the scalability we need to support up to 500 users on the new system,” says Prince.

Find Out More

To find out how our solutions can help your company succeed, talk to an Information Builders representative today. Contact your local Information Builders office, visit us at informationbuilders.com, or in the U.S. and Canada, call **(800) 969-4636**.

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Taking the Lead

Initially, CoilTrak™ will provide Roll Coater's customers with 28 different reports. Built-in OLAP capabilities allow slicing and dicing of data in an almost unlimited number of ways. As a result, users can see the same set of data from many different perspectives – without the complexity and overhead of cubes.

With the application nearing production mode, internal users are providing the first round of feedback, along with a pilot group of Roll Coater's top customers. “Feedback from our users has been positive, and we continue to fine-tune the application based on their experience,” Prince explains. “The accessibility of the information far surpasses what was possible on our old extranet, since all of our reports include both summary and detail-level views.”

Customers can easily view information about inventory, shipping, and order status, using intelligent formatting to determine exact product information. “They can summarize each order by color, size, and other parameters, then drill down further to consider individual item details,” Prince explains.

A calendar function allows users to determine shipping and receiving information for any given day, while a “Coil List” feature provides canned reports for obtaining inventory information very quickly. “Users can access the extranet with a simple Web browser,” Prince says. “No client-side software is required.”

Additionally, online shipping reports let customers see exactly what has been shipped, including all the details of the shipping order. “Users can drill down to view the actual bill of lading and get a copy of it,” Prince explains. “We didn't have to create anything new to do this. WebFOCUS links directly to the bill of lading on the legacy system and can read any of our back-end data types. In this case, it links directly to a PDF version of the bill of lading on the server. This eliminates a lot of phone calls to our customer service department.”

The broad data access capabilities of WebFOCUS enabled Roll Coater to present this diverse set of information via a single interface. “Getting us down to one interface for the data allows us to phase out some of the costs of back-end programming,” Prince says. “This is one of the many benefits of using the WebFOCUS environment.”

As customers learn to access information directly, Roll Coater will be able to reduce costs in several ways. “Direct cost savings will stem from reducing phone, fax, and e-mail activity handled by customer service reps,” Prince confirms. “This will have the corollary effect of improving customer loyalty since these are self-service features the user base has been requesting.”

Prince believes any manufacturing organization can benefit from a self-service information system that provides these types of extensive services. “We had an extranet, but we could not adequately enhance its capabilities,” he says. “With the WebFOCUS solution, we have the technology we need to continually adapt to evolving needs.”

Roll Coater President Bob O'Neal agrees that WebFOCUS is a crucial component in meeting the company's charter. “Our vision is to be number one in our industry,” he concludes. “WebFOCUS fits very nicely with our vision of where we want to go in the future, and helps us develop the information systems we need to get there.”

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