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Michael R. Crowley, Business Analyst /Programmer, NB Coatings

NB Coatings Automates Inventory Control with the RFgen Framework

Mobile and Wireless SAP Data Collection Application Delivers Impressive ROI

Business Challenge

- Design and implement entire new IT infrastructure after company acquisition
- Deploy new SAP system and bar coding application in very short timeframe

Solution

- RFgen Framework for SAP

Results

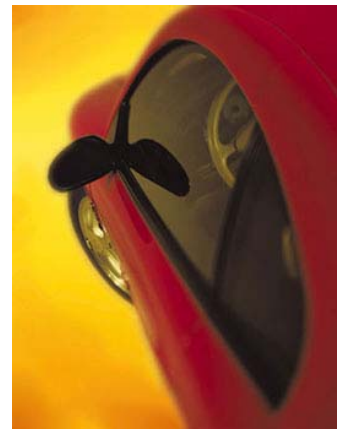
- Met short implementation deadlines through RFgen’s simple processes for designing, testing, and deploying applications with built-in functionality
- Reduced TCO with implementation costs \$200K less than competitive products
- Maximized ROI by eliminating \$100K per year in manual administrative costs
- Obtained user-friendly bar coding system that requires practically no training and maintenance

The Leader in Paint-On-Plastics

NB Coatings Inc. (NBCi) is the leader in the North American plastic automotive coatings market. The company was formed on October of 2006, when Rohm and Haas sold its Automotive Coatings Division to Nippon Paint. Using the industry's most innovative technologies, NBCi serves automaker's ever-advancing needs for high performance and cost effective paint-on-plastic solutions.

As a result of the 2006 acquisition, NBCi was forced to undergo a complete IT infrastructure redesign. The division’s previous parent company (Rohm and Haas) had maintained all servers, performed all network administration, and managed everything to do with the SAP and the bar coding application at its Philadelphia data center. As part of the purchase agreement, the division was to be completely divested from Rohm and Haas’s computer systems by June 1st of 2007. NBCi needed to have all of its own servers, applications, and network administration in place and operational by the deadline.

NBCi needed to develop a new bar coding solution for use in its plant, and bring all database servers, print file servers, and email applications back in-house. The division’s IT team had to purchase new SAP licenses, perform the implementation, and go-live in just six months. “We were faced with an enormous challenge – implementing an entirely new ERP environment in just under six months,” explained Mike Crowley, Business Analyst /Programmer, NB Coatings. “That’s a very short period of time to make that many changes – especially considering we didn’t have extra resources to dedicate to the transition.”



Adding the RFgen Bar Coding Application

After all major infrastructure decisions were made, NBCi began looking for a bar coding solution that would work with its new SAP infrastructure. Mike started by looking at the data collection solution that had been used at Rohm Haas. The division was familiar with that application from an end-user standpoint, but since it had been managed at the parent company's central datacenter, the division had no experience with the implementation and management of the SAP console solution.

"The driving force in our selection was the economics – both short-term with the acquisition and implementation costs, as well as the long-term overhead of administration and maintenance," explained Mike. "We compared the TCO of several data collection solutions, and quickly realized that the RFgen Framework would be able to offer us a better ROI than any of the competitive options."

The application implementation was performed by RFgen developers. NBCi already had the hardware for the new RFgen application, including bar code scanners and the antennae from the acquisition. The RFgen developers worked closely with Mike on transaction configuration and encoding. "The only thing we had to do from our end was set up a relatively small Windows server and install the software," explained Mike. "With the help of the RFgen developers, the system went live after only six weeks."

"Any time you are forced to do an ERP implementation quickly, it can get pretty crazy," admitted Mike. "The reason RFgen was such a success story for us was that my involvement was minimal – which was great because of my other IT obligations. Most of our involvement was limited to setting up access permissions for RFgen developers. Our end users were able to test the new system almost immediately, with training provided during a few short WebEx sessions."

The RFgen System in Action

The application came up strong with no issues. "There were only a few very minor tweaks needed and I was able to do them all myself very quickly," stated Mike. "We can now track all 15,000 different materials with our SAP system – 3,000 on a daily basis. We record all warehouse transfers, material movement, inventory checks, goods issued to cost centers, and goods issued to process orders using the RFgen system."

"We have 400 licenses with SAP in our company, of which 35 are used for the RFgen application," stated Mike. "On average, there are 25 people using the system at one time through the hand-held devices and the RFgen Windows client that is loaded onto a PC. Our end users can now perform approximately 2,500 transactions per day quickly and error-free with the RFgen system."



Streamlining Operations and Saving Money

The RFgen solution has been very cost effective for NBCi. "The upfront costs of the software and for developers to create transactions to our specifications were very low. We started with RFgen-supplied open source transactions. Most were modified slightly to accommodate some of the unique things we wanted to do, to ensure that our end-user operators were gathering all of the right information."

The ongoing maintenance – consisting only of small modification to the transactions – Mike is able to do by himself. "RFgen is a very user friendly system for developers," explained Mike. "This is in contrast to some of the arcane scripting requirements of the SAP console. RFgen uses Visual Basic, making it very easy to find people who can work with the software. The tough stuff, like integration with SAP – is handled in the background. I just make small changes to 'If' statements and other simple programming tasks."

"We are a 500-person operation with annual sales over \$150M," stated Mike. "Our savings during the RFgen implementation stage alone were in the range of \$200K compared to the competition. We also did some

studies to calculate the ROI of the RFgen solution. Compared to manual inventory methods, the solution enables us to eliminate two full time headcount that would have been required to manually handle all of the clerical transactions for our warehouse and manufacturing groups. This saves us approximately \$200K per year in ongoing headcount expense.”

“The RFgen system practically administers itself. All user logins are handled through SAP. Once the software is installed on the server – just a standard Windows server – all training on the transactions is done by our front line supervisors. I never have to get involved. The average user can pick up the hand gun cold and follow the prompts without receiving any training at all. We keep the system pretty locked down as to what end users can do, so we can maintain the integrity of the system.”

Moving Forward

With the complete success of the RFgen implementation and its ease of use on the factory floor, NBCi is now looking to expand the use of the solution. “One of the selling points for us when considering the RFgen solution was the ability to use the software for other divisions and applications across our company. One of our first targets is automating our consignment inventory for our largest customers. “The RFgen system is very user friendly and its performance is rock-solid,” concluded Mike. “It was fast to implement, easy to use, and almost effortless to maintain. We couldn’t be happier with the solution!”

About RFgen

El Dorado Hills, California-based DataMAX Software Group, Inc. helps organizations reduce supply chain implementation costs with the industry’s most elegant and flexible mobile and wireless automated data collection (ADC) technology. In business since 1983, software from the DataMAX Group has a proven track record of success when it comes to designing, implementing, and deploying wireless and mobile solutions.

DataMAX's flagship product, the RFgen Framework, is a horizontal system for delivering wireless and mobile automated data capture solutions. RFgen-enabled solutions can be found in over half of all Fortune 100 manufacturing companies as well as in numerous mid-level and smaller enterprises. Whether the target is distribution, manufacturing, retail, agriculture, pharmaceuticals, healthcare, or something else, RFgen is flexible enough to meet each customer’s unique requirements; a fact to which the company’s 2000+ customers and over 30,000 daily users can readily attest. For more information, please visit www.rfgen.com or contact your nearest sales representative at 916.939.4065.