

World Commerce Services Hits the Trifecta with QuestaWeb Software

Background

World Commerce Services, LLC (WCS) is an international transportation service provider headquartered in Chicago, with offices in New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Atlanta. The firm not only moves cargo and facilitates border crossings through U.S. and global customs agencies but also provides transportation consultation services. WCS prides itself on "moving cargo and information" efficiently and effectively.

In 2005, the firm realized that a major internal vulnerability existed: the software responsible for all its business operations was a legacy system written and maintained by a one-person firm. As WCS President and CEO Remo Picchietti shared, "When I assumed leadership, I recognized the enormity of the corporate challenge we faced. The entire basis of the company rested on a single individual." And, in spite of numerous modifications to update and advance the software to accommodate new business needs (e.g., importing/exporting cargo and managing vendor purchase orders), the system could not support the firm's current functions much less sustain anticipated future growth.

Challenges

WCS faced significant corporate and operational challenges. From a corporate perspective, there was no visibility. Managers in Chicago could not "see" what was occurring within remote offices because, even though each facility ran the same software, the systems were not integrated. This design flaw translated to the operational equivalent of five separate systems. Consequently, WCS could not automatically generate consolidated financial statements. To achieve visibility on its profit and loss (P&L) statement, headquarters staff had to undertake a labor-intensive procedure, remotely logging on to each office's system and then printing a complete set of business reports in hard-copy format; software limitations precluded downloading electronic data into Excel or similar programs. After printing reports for each office, personnel manually rekeyed all the data in an Excel program used for consolidated budgeting and reporting. Inefficiencies abounded in this process, costing the firm thousands of dollars in staff hours every time management data were required. Keying errors were common, diminishing the reliability of the financial reports underlying critical corporate decisions.

At the operational level, WCS faced a recurring system problem: even though data might already exist within the system, they were not retrievable for a secondary use. For example, most clients use WCS for both ocean freight and brokerage services. WCS staff would enter all the requisite data into the system to accomplish ocean freight-related transactions. When the shipment entered the United States, however, brokerage personnel could not access these data and had to reenter at least 24 data fields to complete brokerage transactions. Rekeying data is inefficient and creates opportunities for costly mistakes. Worse, it is a major personnel resource drain, inhibiting staff from pursuing more productive tasks.

Finally, WCS customers require current information on shipment status to manage their supply chains effectively. Thus, frequent telephonic requests for status information were commonplace. Each request took WCS staff away from normal duties and created substantial additional work to manually research both

At a Glance

Background

- Every WCS business process relied on legacy software operated by a one-person firm.

Challenges

- Software limitations prevented a fully integrated system and made electronic data download impossible.
- Personnel spent hours rekeying data to produce documents and reports.
- Staff manually tracked shipments for customers.

Solution

- QuestaWeb TradeMaster^{QW} modules: *Import Freight Forwarders^{QW}, Export Freight Forwarders^{QW}, Customs House Brokers^{QW} and Track & Trace^{QW}*

Results

- WCS possesses a fully integrated, Web-based system
- Consolidated management reports are generated with a single keystroke.
- WCS is growing at a rate of 20% per year without hiring additional staff.
- Customer satisfaction levels are unprecedented.



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shipment specifics and current location. WCS needed a more efficient method for responding to track-and-trace requests.

Solution

WCS sought an integrated software solution that met 100% of its existing functional requirements yet was flexible enough to accommodate new business needs arising from planned growth. Picchietti led a formalized search process, assisted by his CFO and IT Director, that solicited proposals from all software providers in the global logistics industry. Essential system requirements, culled from a series of in-house user group meetings, included the ability to sit on a central SQL server behind the firm's firewall, accessible via the Internet, scalable, capacity for real-time shipment track and trace and full integration with the accounting system. Above all, the software had to give WCS personnel total access to all corporate data and be flexible enough to allow WCS personnel to program reports in-house.

Picchietti related, "Our search revealed that the marketplace offered an abundance of really great brokerage software, but that this software was limited in that it could not handle other aspects of our business such as importing or exporting. Only a few vendors offered software that could meet all our business needs. When we factored in corporate expertise and ability to provide ongoing support, QuestaWeb stood alone as the vendor that could do it all. Its modular format allowed us to purchase the fully integrated components we needed now, knowing we could add to our system later."

WCS purchased four QuestaWeb TradeMaster^{OW} modules to handle import freight forwarding, export freight forwarding, Customs brokerage and track and trace. Together, the modules streamlined activities such as bookings, consolidations/deconsolidations, break bulk, classifications, valuations, compliance and clearance. The TradeMaster^{OW} Track & Trace module allows customers and their agents to access the WCS Web site via Internet, enter a unique user name and password and obtain real-time status information without ever speaking to WCS staff. Because the TradeMaster^{OW} system sits on a central server, all five operating sites are fully integrated with each other and with accounting activities such as accounts receivable, accounts payable, general ledger and profit-and-loss reporting. System data automatically populate forms, regardless of transaction type, eliminating keying requirements. Moreover, the system recognizes repetitive entries and automatically generates documentation based on past preferences, freeing personnel from "recreating the wheel" each and every time.

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Results

Since "going live" nearly two years ago, WCS operations are more efficient. WCS staff members can process more jobs more accurately and quickly. Just as important, corporate operations now rely on an ahead-of-the-curve, Web-based system written in C# and .NET that is backed by a credible firm with support staff ready to respond to the firm's every need. TradeMaster^{OW}'s inherent flexibility and scalability give WCS the ability to accommodate new offices, expand business offerings and create any conceivable management report in-house. Consolidated financial reports are available with a single keystroke, and no rekeying of data is required for different transactions, freeing staff for more productive tasks. Best of all, worldwide customers and contractors can obtain real-time status information themselves whenever they wish.

According to Picchietti, "We have been able to grow our business at a rate of 20% per year without hiring any additional staff. At the end of the day, this level of productivity increase gives us the competitive edge we need to be successful."

Leon Turetsky, CEO of QuestaWeb, offers, "The efficiencies attained by WCS speak to the important difference global trade and logistics management solutions can make in a firm's day-to-day operations. Not only did TradeMaster^{OW} help WCS improve customer satisfaction and better control costs but also reexamine outdated business processes. The combined effect on the bottom line is nothing short of remarkable."