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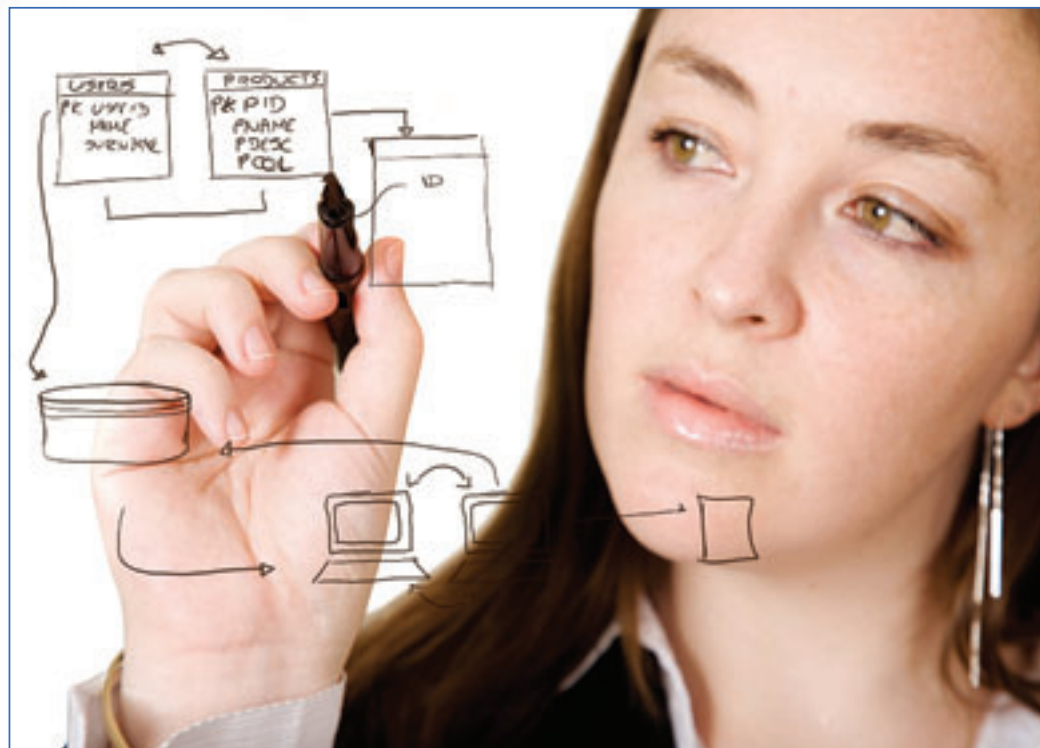
RepLink ‘Sales Away’ with Windward

Managing a database of 50,000 products from 500+ brands is a demanding task. Combine that rich data with more than 300 rep companies, 100 suppliers, and 50 direct buyers worldwide who need secure, reliable access to the database, and you have a picture of the intricate challenge that RepLink, a leader in Incentive Market Sales Tools, faces every day.

Based in Minneapolis, MN, RepLink services both the companies that put together incentive programs offering branded merchandise and the professional incentives buyers who purchase this merchandise. RepLink’s impressive merchandiser list includes Sony, Bulova Watch, Movado, Canon USA, Casio, Coleman, Godiva, and OmahaSteaks, to name just a few, and its system is used by nearly 100% of these companies’ rep organizations.

The incentives industry suffers from a unique problem because the manufacturers all have their own internal databases, but the reps need to access this data as a unified resource. That’s where RepLink comes in. RepLink gives manufacturers the ability to combine their product database information into a single database, which the reps can easily access and navigate.

Up until a few years ago, this process was distributed. Suppliers would have local versions of their



databases, and they would upload their databases to be merged with RepLink’s central server. The reps would download updates—product data from the suppliers who have authorized them to see their products—to their local databases.

In 2005, however, RepLink began transitioning from being a distributed system of desktop applications to a central web-based system, and the com-

pany needed to find a new reporting solution. One of the primary functions of the RepLink system is to generate sales proposals, and because most end users have Microsoft Office on their computers, RepLink creates those templates in Microsoft Word. Therefore, when considering how best to transition to the Web, RepLink had two main criteria it needed to meet.

“First, we had a built-in base of team

members familiar with using Word, and they weren't programmers," says David Boodey, RepLink's Vice President of Technology. "These team members would be creating templates, and we needed a tool they could get up to speed on quickly.

"Second—a very big factor—we had a large library of existing templates we used for our Word Automation solution," he adds. "We needed to be able to reuse all the effort that had gone into creating them, because we were replicating some fairly complicated forms."

The developers began investigating a number of reporting functions, including Microsoft's Reporting Services, Crystal Reports, DataDynamics Active Reports, Windward Reports, and a couple of small third-party solutions. Crystal Reports was "prohibitively expensive," says Boodey, but cost wasn't the only factor he evaluated. He also considered ease of scalability, quality of development support, and template creation.

RepLink selected Windward Reports as its reporting tool, primarily because Windward Reports enables any user, technical or non-technical, to design reports using AutoTag, an easy-to-use add-in for Microsoft Word. Report designers simply open up Word and create their own designs.

"There was tremendous time savings in being able to take the layouts of the old templates and just have to make minor hooks into Windward data sources and just replace the Word Form fields we were using with Windward tags," Boodey says. "The time savings garnered by not having to have someone redo the more complicated table layouts was huge."

With one primary developer, RepLink was able to integrate its new reporting solution quickly, without losing valuable running time.

Additionally, the time and cost savings are ongoing. In RepLink, as in many organizations, the IT staff



typically are more expensive than the non-IT staff, so allowing the non-IT people to create reports saves RepLink money. And that's not the only important reason for having non-IT staff in charge of report design.

"Non-programmers have a better aesthetic," Boodey says. "They bring to the process a better idea of what the report layout should look like. That helps us serve our customers better."

Evelyn Gray is a first-hand example of this. She had no programming background, and she relies on Windward to get the job done. It would be impractical for this support rep to learn to write code or program in another software program such as Crystal Reports.

Microsoft Word with AutoTag®, on the other hand, is straightforward, so Gray didn't have to learn to use a new program to create new templates or update archived ones. From start to finish, Windward Reports allows companies to save money. And if Gray has any questions, she calls the response time from Windward "awesome."

"Customer service is outstanding," Gray says. "Windward Reports does just what we need it to do."

About Windward Reports:

Windward Studios has been in business since 1995. Based in Boulder, Colorado, the company was formed to develop innovative software products for both enterprise and individual customers. Windward Reports is the only comprehensive report generator to use Microsoft Word as a layout tool, thus cutting the learning curve to virtually nil while saving time and money for both technical and non-technical users alike.n

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