

Programming

TOOLS, PRACTICES AND METHODS

S.C. Johnson goes with custom-tools

■ Off-the-shelf software just didn't cut it when reaching out to top-tier customers

BY REBECCA REID

Finding the right software to solve a specific business need can be frustrating. When companies can't find anything off-the-shelf, they have another option — custom-developed software.

That's the path S.C. Johnson and Son Ltd.'s Canadian subsidiary, S.C. Johnson Canada, in Brantford, Ont. took when it wanted to speed up the way the company's salespeople accessed information about its top customers.

"When we looked at off-the-shelf [products], none even came close to what I needed," explained Tim Mulrone, director of sales at S.C. Johnson. That's when it commissioned Insidus Corp., in Richmond Hill, Ont., to build a program tailored to S.C. Johnson's needs. Mulrone said the functionality S.C. Johnson required was not available in any commercial off-the-shelf software (COTS).

The primary advantage to custom-built software is customers get a program that is customized

to find their business process and can create items like special reports and charts, said Lubo Zizakovic, president of Insidus.

Independent software vendors (ISVs) like Oracle Corp. and SAP AG create software applications that are packed with tons of features that are targeted at a wide audience, Zizakovic explained.

For example, if an ISV creates a health care application to track

patient records, different organizations will use it differently and not everyone will use the same features, he said.

Before it deployed the custom-build program, Market Manager, S.C. Johnson had a lot of customer data tied up in Excel spreadsheets. It had about 25 salespeople who used these spreadsheets to keep track of what products each of its customers were selling, Mulrone said.

If Mulrone wanted to find out, for example, which S.C. Johnson products were sold by

Wal-Mart and how this data had changed over a given period of time, he would have needed

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to examine about 25 spreadsheets to find the right information, potentially taking hours, he said. Now he said it takes only a few clicks and about five seconds to get at the right information. S.C. Johnson sells about 250 household products including the brands Windex, Ziploc and Glade.

New product releases by S.C. Johnson are always preceded by marketing campaigns to generate interest, but the firm found that sometimes its retail distributors were not committed to selling these new products. This meant that eager customers searching for the latest product often left the stores empty-handed.

Market Manager lets S.C. Johnson keep track of information about what its customers are selling and at what price. The program will also notify the user — by a red flag — if a user

stops selling a product or is selling the product much lower or higher than the recommended retail price.

Market Manager went live eight months ago and Mulrone said it is outstanding.

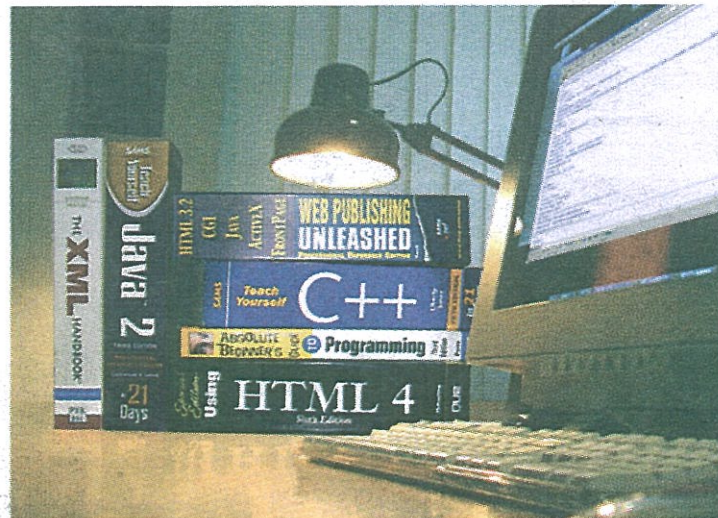
To help users learn the program, Insidus includes a comprehensive learning and self-help program with each software package it creates.

One thing that particularly helped the project's success was Insidus' ability to understand S.C. Johnson's business. Insidus was not the first custom-software developer S.C. Johnson commissioned to solve this problem but it was the only successful one, Mulrone said. Other firms had failed because they made them too complicated by trying to incorporate too many systems, he explained.

Insidus takes a piecemeal approach to development by first understanding business needs.

As the project progresses, Insidus shows customers sections of the program as they are completed so they can provide input about its architecture.

In the case of S.C. Johnson, Mulrone said Insidus' Zizakovic got it right about 80 per cent of the time. ☎ 059345



Custom-built solutions deliver features designed for customer's business needs.