

InFORM Provides Alltrade with Tools for Data Management

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We all know that the tools make the man—or something like that. But honestly, what's more important than the tools you need every day to do your job well? Can you imagine changing your oil without a socket wrench or building a web application without your handy HTML tool? Well, stuck in a similar situation, Alltrade tools had all the machinery it needed to keep its customers happy, but it lacked the tool to automate report distribution and help keep its business running smoothly and efficiently and control growing operating costs.

[Alltrade Tools LLC](#) designs, manufactures, and markets tools and shop equipment. Founded in 1979, the Long Beach, California-based firm is privately held, with global manufacturing and sales facilities serving customers on every continent.

With nearly 100 patents and a multimillion-dollar annual investment in product development, Alltrade is a serious business. As both a direct seller and reseller, the company applies market research, industrial design, in-house graphics capability, and account-specific sales and marketing resources to ensure retail partners stay competitive.

Today, Alltrade offers retailers a steady supply of mechanic's tools, hand tools, power inventors, and a veritable unending list of other useful equipment (and it really is unending—the company's website has an option for inventors to send in new tool ideas!). Impressively, Alltrade does all of this with a modest staff of 55 people and from a single 525 server running 5.4. The company has 40 client machines connected to the server, and four folks run the IT department, including Eric Roberts, the project leader.

## **A Wrench in the Plans**

Things were running smoothly until fall 2007, when one of Alltrade's customers mandated email notification of return authorizations, which Alltrade's current solution didn't support. Roberts says the company knew it had to find a quick solution to the customer's demand that wouldn't break the bank. It absolutely had to be done. "Basically, a demand of this nature from a major customer justifies itself," Roberts says. He got to work right away and formed a committee to solve the problem. He gathered the managers of the affected departments, and they put their heads together to find a solution that would fix the problem with minimal user interaction.

Because Roberts was under the gun to fix the problem ASAP, he investigated a company he already was familiar with. Roberts had looked into automated report distribution for another project, and Alltrade had selected inFORM Decisions' solutions for printing bar codes and specific documents like invoices, bills of lading, etc., so "adding iMail and iPDF was an easy add-on," Roberts said.

"As an existing inFORM Decisions product user, I had some prior knowledge of their other products, so they were the first people I contacted. We did an online demo with inFORM Decisions once we decided they had what appeared to be the best solution." Alltrade purchased the solution directly from inFORM Decisions.

iMail lets i users send messages, business documents, and spooled file reports in readable formats so that organizations can upgrade to a paperless environment. The iMail native email module snaps onto the company's iDocs Administrator or works standalone to provide automated distribution of reports, forms, and databases. Users attach and distribute forms, reports, and database files in popular formats, including PDF, TEXT, EXCEL, HTML, RTF, ZIP, TXT, and PCL.

inFORM Decisions' iPDF solution is a native PCL to PDF converter for IBM i that converts standard HP Laserjet output into PDF format, eliminating the need to download files to a PC (or secondary server) to process PDF files, which improves security and speed of PDF document conversion.

## **On-the-job Training**

Roberts and his team were sold. "We plugged it in, turned it on, and used our production environment to test with. Fortunately, we can reproduce most documents easily," he says, so there was little to no training required. "We needed very little customization to fine-tune the solution. Some minor field position changes to allow the Bar Codes to be printed in a more 'scanable' place on the form were needed, but we were up and running within 30 days." During that time, Roberts says, Alltrade had some minor setup issues, but they were quickly resolved with two phone calls to inFORM Decisions' support squad.

"The product lived up to my expectations and then some," Roberts says. "We've applied the product to other applications since the initial implementation." And Alltrade has seen benefits in several areas they had not planned on improving upon implementation. "The ability to print bar codes allowed us to take full advantage of scanner technology in our warehousing applications," he says. "The Forms Design function allowed us some flexibility with customizing documents to specific customer needs. Also, we're using plain paper forms instead of preprinted, which is obviously less expensive, so we'll save some money."

## **Taking Care of Business**

A year later, Alltrade's processes couldn't be more improved because of its decision to use inFORM Decisions' automated report solutions. The company has reduced entry errors and can now keep electronic copies of reports and documents instead of paper ones. The implementation also has enabled the company to forgo tracking documents manually. Most notably, the company can now supply the sales staff with electronic reports, letting them access their reports regardless of their physical location. The only thing Roberts wishes he would have done differently with inFORM Decisions' solutions is more research. "I wish we'd looked at all the functions sooner, because we could have taken advantage of them much earlier," he admits. But Alltrade isn't wasting any more time, and Roberts says the company is looking into implementing iView (a snap-on document archive and retrieval module that stores merged forms and reports with user defined indexes and a web-based portal) for full document storage and retrieval.

"I've been quite impressed with inFORM from the start," Roberts says. "They have been responsive with their support, easy to work with, and the products offer great functionality for the price. Plus, having everything reside on our i makes backup and recovery much easier, should the situation arise."

If it does, Alltrade will have the right tools for the job.

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