

HANDS-ON LABS

Science lab kits manufacturer masters challenge of complex order configuration



HANDS-ON LABS, INC.

Producer of



Company

Hands-On Labs, Inc.
Englewood, CO
www.labpaq.com

Corporate Details

Founded in 1994 by college professors to develop a micro-lab chemistry kit for students, LabPaq by Hands-on Labs, Inc. cover more than 350 campus-equivalent experiments spanning most science disciplines, including allied health, anatomy & physiology, biology, chemistry, earth science, environmental science, forensics, geology, microbiology, and physics. The entrepreneurial firm works with over 700 campuses and has a presence in each of the 50 states. LabPaqs tailor traditional classroom curriculums to meet the needs of the growing online education market.

Hands-on Labs, Inc. (HOL) produces LabPaqs, a unique science kit that provide students with the opportunity to fulfill science laboratory requirements without being on campus. Its extensive line of LabPaqs science kits for multiple disciplines provides all lab equipment, materials, and instructions to safety and effectively enable students to perform science experiments off campus at their convenience.

Challenge

Online education is one of the hottest new trends today in post-secondary education. It greatly expands the scope of course offerings and the reach of individual professors, and provides students with a cost-effective means of getting instruction. Up until recently, however, science classes were beyond the reach of online education, as course work typically is dependent on hands-on lab work.

HOL created its versatile LabPaq line to address this challenge. LabPaqs provides the science equipment, chemicals, specimens, supplies, personal safety items, and CD-based lab manuals necessary for remote lab work.

The only company of its kind, HOL has seen phenomenal growth. Based in Englewood, CO, it was named the 35th fastest growing small company in the metropolitan Denver area in 2011; and ranked #1625 in Inc.5000's 2011 magazine's list, as well.

The core of its original business system solution included Excel spreadsheets for product configuration; QuickBooks for material planning and forecasting; a basic order management system; and a bare-bones, inflexible hosted CRM system.

“With the Experlogix Configurator running inside Dynamics CRM, we’ve seen our time-to-quote reduced from as much as 2 days down to 5 minutes.”

- Jeff Klinger, Director of Operations

Given that each LabPaq is essentially a unique, one-off creation that has to be configured to each instructor's course syllabus, the challenge of quickly developing accurate customer order quotes – compounded by rapid business growth – outpaced the power of Excel spreadsheets to ably handle the task.

“We were manually creating complex product orders based on Excel,” says Jeff Klinger, Director of Operations. “It was very time consuming and error prone. We began looking for the right tools that could manage our business rules and quickly generate order prices that we could reliably quote to our customers.”

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Benefits

- Improved accuracy of quotes.
- Time-to-quote reduced from 2 days to 5 minutes.
- Simple archival and traceability of all quotes.
- Single source of the truth.
- Strong platform for continued rapid business growth.

Solution

HOL elected to upgrade its entire enterprise solution. It selected Microsoft Dynamics NAV ERP for finance, material planning, order processing, and inventory; and Microsoft's Dynamics CRM solution to gain greater control over the management of opportunities, customers, and contacts.

HOL researched the Experlogix Product Configurator for managing the complexity of generating custom, customer order configurations.

"We wanted a tool with an intuitive user interface," says Klinger. "We also wanted one that could manage all the business rules our sales team uses generating custom or configured customer orders. It had to be simple to use, but one that could group, filter, and sort items in much the same way the Excel program did – but with greater flexibility and functional power."

HOL decided that Experlogix should integrate directly with the Dynamics CRM system. Webfortis, the Dynamics CRM VAR, engineered the primary enterprise integration between Dynamics NAV and Dynamics CRM, using the Scribe data integration toolset. The company also updated its e-commerce front-end to better integrate with Dynamics NAV. As a result, all process and data flows became virtually seamless between all systems.

Result

"One of the most valuable Experlogix features is its rules engine. Every order is unique. It's not just the sum of all options. Materials for every LabPaq are uniquely specified in varying amounts," Klinger states.

Experlogix worked with HOL to enable the system to handle quantity variation, making it easy for the Experlogix Configurator to create more than 2,500 unique rules for material variation alone. HOL had a fairly unique format for how their Bill of Materials (BOM) was being generated, but Experlogix's ease of extensibility allowed the system to be tailored exactly to their needs. "Experlogix solved the challenge in a very straightforward, logical manner," says Klinger.

Clients design detailed experiments that are maintained as opportunities, or "soft orders," in the company's Dynamics CRM system. Over 90 percent of all orders come in through the company's e-commerce site. Orders are then received into Dynamics NAV, which handles management of matching all the configured sales opportunities.

"We were very fortunate to have a really good team of consultants from all three vendors that worked smoothly together," Klinger says. "The integrated Experlogix-Microsoft Dynamics NAV-and-Dynamics CRM solution provides us with a single source of information. It's the platform we need for both managing and growing the business."