Exsys Case Study

Online Configuration Advisory Systems Help Drive HP's E-Business Strategy

Hewlett Packard Interactive System Determines Best Hardware and Network Configuration for Customers

Hewlett Packard's deployment of CAST/BW incorporates Exsys advisory products and services. The interactive advice system provides quick, accurate hardware sizing, network configuration, and usage recommendations for SAP Business Information Warehouse implementations. The system turns expert knowledge from SAP, HP internal competency centers, the HP Enterprise Server Group and existing SAP BW implementations, into an easy to use advisory tool. These types of knowledge automation systems enable businesses to deliver a wide range of online advice to sales staff, employees, customers and potential clients.

The CAST/BW online advisor functions much in the same way as working directly with the company's most knowledgeable system analyst and product representative – and it's available worldwide, 24 hours a day. It reduces days of work, phone calls, and emails – and guesses and estimates – into a few-minute online interaction that produces an expert recommendation. The system results are presented as a printable HTML page complete with product images, system recommendation and configurations, and it offers direct links to order processing.

The future of the Internet is based on the fact that trillions of transactions are moving to the Internet. That fact will require vendors like HP, as well as customers, to become smarter about how best to use Internet infrastructure.

Currently, most Web sites only offer information. It's like walking into a library and wondering how to find the answers you need, and then start "hit-n-miss" wading through the content. By incorporating interactive advisory systems, companies can offer expert advice. It's like walking into a library and working with the most experienced librarians. Or, an online store that you consult with their best sales person to help you select the best product for your specific situation.

The CAST/BW system is implemented as part of the Enterprise Systems Products Store which also offers product information, pricing and ordering of HP 9000 Enterprise Servers, VISUALIZE Workstations and Storage products. The sizing and configuration rules are continuously updated and refined to incorporate new research and new HP products.

Customers are taken through an interactive query session that asks for pertinent details on current SAP R/3 environment business warehouse parameters, industry, maximum number of concurrent users, number of "InfoCubes" (multi-dimentional data stores of individual *business* points of view) to be implemented, and whether cost or performance is the driving factor in the configuration.

The inference engine determines the best hardware configuration based on the rules in the knowledge base as well as the customer requirements, recommends the configuration, and also provides a link to the HP E Commerce Web page. (This allows the customer to price and order the system.) The knowledge automation system makes needed external calls to databases and data sources. The results page is dated, customer input is displayed, and a visual diagram with product photos show the appropriate equipment and system configuration, and details on processors and memory. The customer is warned of any problems in performance, and significant upgrades are recommended. A link to the HP's E-Products section leads to pricing and details for their configuration.

Selecting which products best meet a customers needs and requirements can be a very intricate process. But it is one that can be expressed in logic rules relating to customer needs and product specifications. Advisory products built on knowledge automation systems can handle conflicting requirements and always give a recommendation of the best fit, even when all customer desires can not be met. Different real-time data can come into play such as inventory, current pricing and customer requirements. Knowledge automation systems also provide the ability to change/rerun and go through several different configurations based on different criteria, e.g.: a cost driven vs. performance driven comparison. They also make it possible for staff to identify cross-selling opportunities and be able to sell a much broader, more complex product line.