

Walon boosts workshop productivity with LANSA



Walon, the leading supplier of finished vehicle logistics to the U.K. motor industry, is responsible for over 1.2 million vehicle movements a year on behalf of vehicle manufacturers, fleet operators and dealers. In its first year with LANSA, Walon gave manufacturers and dealers Web access to its Vehicle Tracking Management System (VTMS) and built a real-time Workshop Management Control system.

Colin Williams, head of IT at Walon, says, "Using LANSA, our own experienced team added functionality to our existing VTMS. We can now manage our workshops in a far more sophisticated way and offer our customers contracts that measure activities in greater detail and in real time. We also supported totally new revenue streams. There is now enthusiasm in the company for us to deliver more good-looking applications through LANSA and further new products and services."

The Challenge of Adding Value

Walon takes responsibility for a vehicle from the point it arrives in the U.K. off a ship or from the production line of a manufacturer. Via its network of 25 centers and a fleet of 500 car transporters, Walon then delivers the vehicles to the dealers of most major vehicle manufacturers and leading brands, including Alfa Romeo, BMW, Fiat, GM, Lexus, Mini, Nissan and Toyota, handling half of all new U.K. registered vehicles.

Walon also offers related services, such as customs and excise, pre-delivery inspection, secure vehicle storage and managed services. In addition, Walon performs late configuration and technical enhancements of vehicles to meet model variations, local requirements and individual order specifications.

"Our value-added technical services let manufacturers build more generic vehicles for the global marketplace, which we enhance for the U.K. marketplace and to individual requirements," explains Williams.

"In our workshops, we handle anything from changing a badge, fitting an alarm or audio system, upgrading wheels and tires, to cutting and stitching leather for the interior and seats."

"We manage all the administrative processes in VTMS. Starting from the beginning, when a batch of, say 800 to 1500, vehicles arrive at a compound, our staff use handheld devices to scan a barcode that uniquely identifies the car through its preparation and delivery stages. All our compounds have wireless networks, so the moment a barcode is scanned, the vehicle

is registered in real time in our VTMS as being under our care and responsibility."

"We monitor performance in real time and take action immediately during a shift."

"We update the manufacturer via EDI or data transfer with vehicle progress, including as components are fitted. The manufacturer typically feeds these updates into their dealer management system. We receive EDI transmissions throughout the day from manufacturers instructing us to deliver vehicles to specific dealerships or destinations. Most of our data communication is with the manufacturer, they are our customers, and historically it was up to them to keep their dealers informed."

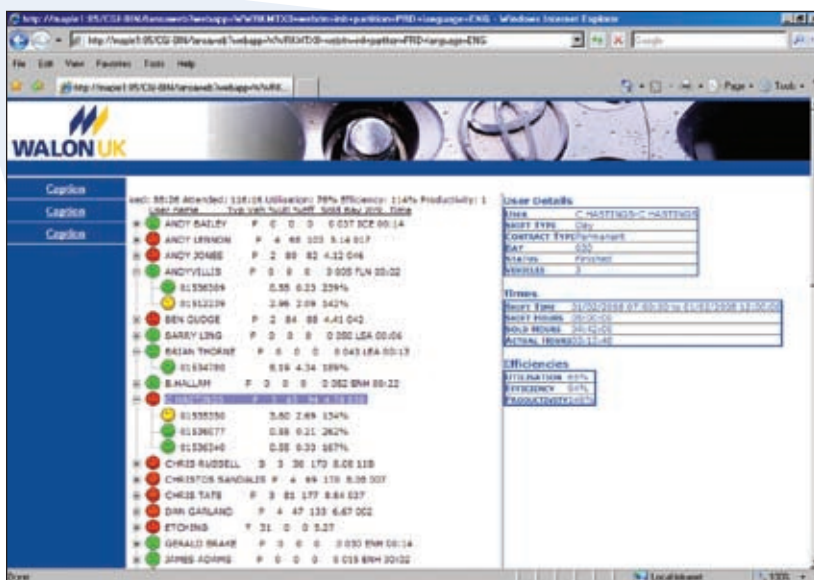
"However, things are now changing. We want to give both dealers and manufacturers Web access to our VTMS for them to see the progress of their vehicles. In the past, we used Web facing products, but these have their limitations."

"VTMS has just over 600 internal users and has been enhanced and extended continuously in RPG since we delivered the first version in 1990. Over the last few years, we evaluated modernization tools and selected LANSA for its productivity and easy integration with our existing VTMS and System21 (Aurora) software."

"LANSA also stood out because it offered a practical framework approach to modernizing our internal applications. LANSA's Web Application Modules (WAMs) let us use the same components in Web applications for external users, as well as in Windows applications for internal users."

"In 2007, LANSA became a major part of what we call Project Vision, our VTMS modernization project. We also fitted our trucks with GPRS connected PDAs and printers that let us inform our customers of the actual delivery date and time and promote a paperless environment."

"To meet priority business requirements, we started with three small, but very visible and high impact, LANSA projects." →



Using the new workshop management control system, Walon can now monitor performance levels, both individually and as a department, in real time and take immediate remedial action.

Online Vehicle Configuration

Walon's first LANSAs application lets dealers configure vans and small trucks online. The dealer places an order for standard vehicles on the manufacturer's site. If modifications are needed, the site re-directs them to Walon's site and they see the price and expected delivery date as they select options.

"In effect the dealer is registering a work order directly in our VTMS scheduling system," explains Williams. "We invoice the manufacturer who then invoices the dealer."

"Using LANSAs we created a totally new revenue stream for our business. Without a Web solution the costs could have been prohibitive. Even though this was our first Web application and also our first LANSAs project, two members of our existing VTMS team delivered it in just three months."

Real-time Workshop Management

The second LANSAs application was a workshop management control system. Historically, Walon would book the budgeted time for all the modifications that were done to a vehicle, regardless of the actual time taken.

Walon installed screens and scanners beside the technician's work bay, so they can register each job as it is done. Each car has a 'my job card' with a barcoded list of the activities that need to be carried out. The technician deals with the activities that he is skilled in and registers the actual start and stop time for each individual task directly into VTMS.

"We can now measure workshop efficiency and provide details of the workshop hours we are selling. Managers can see the efficiency of the whole workshop live through a WAM-developed dashboard," says Williams.

Simon King, Walon's divisional manager for Toyota at the Royal Portbury Dock, comments, "We can now monitor performance levels, both individually and as a department, in real time and take remedial action during a shift. Previously we could only analyze performance levels the following week."

"Over productivity, which can indicate poor work quality, can also be investigated immediately. Quality has gone up two percent and productivity has gone up around four percent at the same time," concludes King.

"We work very closely with Toyota," continues Williams. "They take an active



The Walon IT team: (From left to right) Tim Wiseman – UK IT manager, Colin Williams – Head of IT and Stuart Smith – Project Vision manager.

"Within a year, our existing team delivered three major new products & services."

part in managing the process and are very impressed with the application."

"We can now manage our workshops in a far more sophisticated way and offer our customers contracts that measure activities in greater detail and in real time. The historical data also helps to implement structural improvements and more realistic planning."

Walon's third LANSAs system, also built in 2007, is for the administration of demonstration cars from manufacturers to companies with huge fleets of leased cars. Walon takes care of the inspection, delivery and collection of these cars and also for any damage or warranty issues whilst that car is on loan. Walon built a Web appointment system that lets manufacturers look up and book out available cars.

"We delivered a functionally rich user interface that catered for the calendaring system. Again, as with other developments, LANSAs allows us to utilize the existing VTMS data structures, but in a much more modern way," says Williams.

Modernizing the Core System

"Within a year of purchasing LANSAs, our existing team has been able to deliver three major new products and services to our customers and a lot of business benefits," says Williams.

"Our VTMS still sits virtually unchanged behind the new functionality, but with LANSAs we now have better tools to develop new functionality and frontend applications."

"Now that we have started, there is new enthusiasm in the company for us to deliver more good-looking applications with LANSAs WAMs. Users are coming up with new ideas all the time."

"We enjoy working with LANSAs. Gaining experience in developing XML-based Web applications has given a boost to the skills and confidence of our development team as well."

"Expectations have been raised that we should now use LANSAs to modernize our core VTMS system. We are delivering systems in agreement with the business and give priority to where we can add business benefit, so from that point of view it was good to start with a few very visible Web systems," concludes Williams. ■

COMPANY AND SYSTEM INFORMATION

- Walon, headquartered in Yeovil, Somerset, U.K., is a leading supplier of finished vehicle logistics services to the U.K. automotive industry. With a fleet of over 500 car transporters and a network of 25 centers, it is responsible for over 1.2 million vehicle movements annually. Walon's customers include most major vehicle manufacturers and leading brands, including Alfa Romeo, BMW, Fiat, GM, Lexus, Mini, Nissan and Toyota. Walon UK has 1,800 staff and is part of the AutoLogic company, a leading provider of logistics services that specializes in used vehicle refurbishment and new vehicle preparation, enhancement and distribution. For more information visit: www.walon.com
- Walon has an IT team of 23. The LANSAs applications integrate with Walon's bespoke RPG-based Vehicle Management Tracking System and Infor's System 21 (Aurora).