



A&H Consulting White Paper

PortworX® Customer Self-Service (CSS)



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Executive Summary

Customer Self-Service (CSS) is an independent .NET application to your ERP system. CSS provides your customers with access to real time information at any time, instantly, from anywhere in the world via Internet access. It is an application specifically developed for companies that have customers, or occasional users, that would greatly benefit from using ERP in a narrowed functionality, but have not been granted such access as the license fees do not justify such use.



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Introduction and Overview

Companies have cut nearly all the “fat” out of their organization, but with the market not recovering as expected, this is not enough. In order to stay in business firms have to be relentless; finding more and more tasks that can either be cut or so effectively improved that it saves costs and raises the company’s bottom line. While organizations are faced with many tasks, the one we want to address in this “White Paper” is the improvement of customer service; specifically how A&H Consulting Customer Self-Service application can improve your company’s efficiency and increase overall revenue.

Customer service has come a long way. The initial and seemingly ancient method of dealing with clients by having them writing or faxing you a letter and then you handling the request internally at a speed of “we’ll handle it when we get to it” has long since passed. No company with such a demeanor could survive today’s tough market situation. Today, customers have tremendous choices, and if you as a company are not quick and professional enough to handle your client’s request, your customer will quickly find a substitute. It takes four times as much money to win a new customer (or your old one back) than it does to retain a current customer. To avoid being faced with this predicament you need to offer not only excellent products, but also superior and prompt customer service in near-time at any time from anywhere.

Most companies have implemented and improved their customer service by establishing mechanisms such as call centers and/or Web sites. However, both of these alternatives are not really making your customers happy, are they? Call centers welcome your customers with menus of endless choices. The effect is information accessed or supplied is obsolete, outdated, or not even accessible. In addition, call centers are often not available 24/7/365 and try calling a 1-800 number from an international location. Web sites have tried to overcome some of these challenges. They are available and accessible from anywhere in the world and are easier to navigate; undesired information does not need to be accessed and can be skipped. The major drawback of websites, however, is that they also do not make customers happy because of their poor functionality, limited and rudimentary search capabilities, and inconsistent and ineffective support. In addition, Web sites often access information that is either replicated or in your SAP Business Warehouse and, therefore, not “real-time”. What a disappointment for your customer, who is not interested in the status of yesterday’s delivery, but rather wants to know what the status is right now this second!





You and Your Customer in Alignment

In a perfect world you and your customer's service expectations are aligned and instantly fulfilled.

Imagine your customers being treated as most valued by you.

Imagine your customers asking you specific order information and you providing it in real time, instantly, paperless.

Imagine your field representative following up with your customers and you being able to ease their minds.

You don't have to imagine this anymore. A&H Consulting has developed the Customer Self-Service (CSS) application that will improve your customer service, reduce your overall cost and give your customer's the satisfaction and peace of mind they deserve.

Customer-Self Service (CSS)

The ERP system helps your organization operate the most efficiently and profitable way as its enterprise resource planning (ERP) functionality delivers the reliability, scalability, and operability you expect. However, much of the information available in your ERP is still being replicated when made available through call centers and/or Web sites in an attempt to achieve instant gratification for your customers. Also keep in mind that accessing your Business Warehouse within your ERP is not "real-time" as BW is generally updated only once a day. Customer Self-Service (CSS) is an application that aims to completely eliminate replication by granting direct access to real-time information from anywhere at any time. This is achieved by utilizing the Internet and your PortworX® system. CSS will increase your profitability by connecting your enterprise directly to your customers on their schedule.



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The CSS Application

CSS is part of the PortworX® framework, which is an independent application besides your ERP System. The specific technical requirements and features for the framework and application can be found in a later section of this document. CSS requires ONE database license for PortworX® to access data.

The CSS Opportunity

CSS was developed under the premise to initially give a select group of customer's access to real-time information about your company. It is a tool specifically developed for companies that have customers or occasional users that would greatly benefit from using ERP System in a narrowed functionality, but have not been granted such access as the fees charges do not justify such use. CSS is a cost effective measure that makes it affordable for occasional users to access real-time information and helps you to utilize your Data more efficiently.

With the CSS application you are able to select a group of people or customers you would like to give access to your PortworX® system. After the group, or individuals, is chosen, they will be authenticated in the system and will be authorized to operate within your PortworX®. This procedure is very similar if not identical to how you choose your users internally. The authorization and authentication process may involve a customer number, a specific ID number or name, an invoice number, or any other kind of reference you would like to choose in order to keep optimal security. The customer will log on to your Web site via laptop, desktop, handheld device, etc. and click on a customer service or CSS button. The upcoming screen will prompt the user for an ID, password, etc. in order to log-on to the system. Once authorized to enter the system, PortworX® will make available the relevant information, meaning THAT information that relates to THAT particular user alone, for the user to review. The user can now examine all real-time information relevant for him/her to see: order status, delivery information, billing information, shipping status, invoices, reports, etc. Again, anything he/she is permitted to review.





Pricing

A&H Consultant's goal when developing CSS was to create an application that is beneficial to many if not all industries and corporations utilizing ERP software. As CSS is comparable and superior in functionality to substitutes such as day-to-day call center functions and Web sites, meaning that it provides needed information to your customers, customer representatives, field work representatives, etc.

In order to offer CSS at a competitive price, we researched the general fees companies may encounter when giving occasional user's access to real-time information. In one example you could pay charges an initial one-time fee of generally \$2,000 per user plus an annual maintenance fee of 17% or \$340 per user per year. Hence, if you would grant 100 customers or occasional users access to your system, your initial investment would be \$200,000 plus an annual fee of \$34,000. This sum even grows to 2 million and \$340,000 in annual fees if you want to grant access to 1000 users.

Call centers have an average total cost of \$36,000 – \$40,000 per customer service representative per year and Web site developments addressing customer service issue can reach hundreds of thousands of dollars—depending on the functionality and appeal the company is aiming to achieve.

There are also offers for a one time study of how Portals would benefit your company for \$30,000.00.

CSS is less expensive than either of the above alternatives. Its cost is based on an initial installation fee and an annual maintenance fee. An average installation of CSS will cost about \$50.00 per user plus annual fee for application, update, troubleshooting and maintenance and an \$18,000 for remotely administered operation for a period of 12 months if needed.



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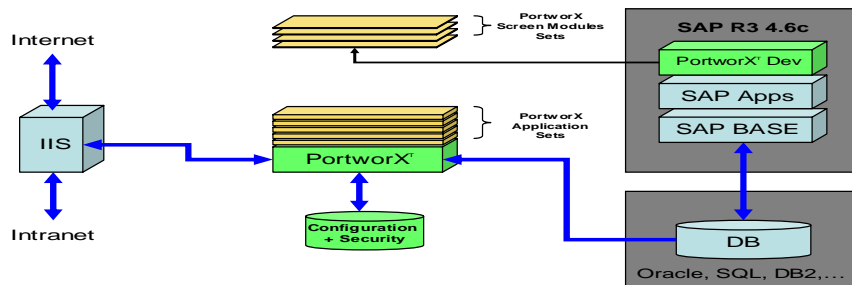
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Technical Considerations

Customer Self-Service (CSS) is the first application within PortworX®. PortworX® is designed as a framework to help you connect your occasional users to real-time ERP data. The value of this framework includes implementation and first year telephone support.

General Architecture



Generally, there are three (3) Parts to PortworX®

- Application Platform
- Custom Application like CSS
- Program Generator

During the development of PortworX®, it was decided to use Microsoft architecture where possible. The reasons for this were ease and speed of development as well as widespread availability of resources for programming in Microsoft technologies.

The Core Application and Custom Applications are written in VB.Net and ASP.Net. Web servers are used to serve web pages built by the Core Application. The pages are built dynamically using ASP.Net and depend on inputs from the user. Customer Self-Service (CSS) is the first application within the PortworX® framework.



Logging On

Initially, users log in to the system with their credentials. These credentials are verified by the Core Application displays the transaction tree which shows users capability to get information. All selections are derived from user parameters and allow a comfortable data request with later drill down into more details.

Finally, the Core Application uses ASP.net technology to build the html page to send to the user and pushes the page to the web server.

Hardware Requirements

There are several possibilities for hardware configuration. You can have a separate server for each of the functions of PortworX®: web server, application server and PortworX® database server, or you can combine services on fewer servers.

The recommended configuration of servers is the same as used in development and testing of PortworX®. The web server was tested on a separate box using Microsoft IIS. The core application server and PortworX® ran on a single server.

Most hardware in data centers are capable of running PortworX®. A minimum of 500 MHZ with 512 MB RAM and a minimum of 1GB free space is recommended for each server.

Software Requirements

The customer Self-Service (CSS) application and PortworX® was designed to run with an SAP R/3 system. The server operating system must be Windows 2000 or better, with the .NET framework installed. Browsers should be IE5.5 or better. PortworX® stores configuration and control data in its own data objects within the PortworX® database.

The parallel processing capability depends on the available resources provided by the database engine.



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A&H Consulting

A&H Consulting (AHC) is a privately held corporation that was founded in January 1997 in Boston, MA by the German entrepreneurs Anne and Hans Kohlmos, who have been serving the SAP community since 1982. Some of our major customers include ExxonMobil, ChevronTexaco, SAP Labs, Hawaiian Tropic, Masonite, and others. We are certified as a women-owned business by the Women Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC).

We specialize in providing value-added services around SAP software and offer a full range of functional and technical SAP expertise in Financial (FI/CO, AM, PRA), Materials Management (MM), and Sales and Distribution (SD). For example:

- SAP implementations,
- Release changes,
- System enhancements and conversions,
- Interface design and development,
- Design and development of additions and extensions to standard SAP software,
- Troubleshooting, and
- SAP software R & D,
- In-house development.

In order to serve our clients in both more cost effective and time efficient fashions, we have entered into strategic alliances with select SAP consulting companies located throughout the nation. Our partners in California, Massachusetts, Florida, and South Dakota not only complement our services but also extend our knowledge within all SAP modules.

AHC is an EOE and offers its employees tremendous benefits. AHC realizes that its employees are its greatest assets, especially in striving to become one of the nation's most qualified niche SAP services.



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