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Major Distributor

Implement Universal Product Codes
An Enterprise Infrastructure Architecture Assessment on the iSeries configuration

Case Study

Solution Overview

Industry
Distribution

Architecture
(iSeries) AS400
iSeries
SQL

Products Used
RPGIV
CLP
Visual Basic

Development Resources
Encore Consulting Services, Inc.

Development Time and Cost
17 months with 2 person team

Benefits
Lay the groundwork to eliminate the time consuming process of maintaining a table cross referencing each agents unique part number with the corresponding internal part number.

Free up employees with extensive product knowledge to do more important work.

Shorten the process cycle time.

IBM Premier Business Partner

A leading distributor of housekeeping and maintenance supplies, industrial packaging, food service disposables, and related products. A $7 billion distribution organization, this distributor serves the health care, manufacturing, and facilities management and maintenance industries by consolidating the resources and strengths of more than 80 distributors, with nearly 400 distribution facilities throughout North America and delivering to over 750,000 customer locations.

The client provides volume purchase pricing and collection services to their distributor/owners. They have an AS400 computer running proprietary programs as well as an ERP package. Each distributor may use unique part numbers. Each invoice contains the agents' part number and the interim part number.

Managing the translation tables is a tedious, time consuming, and costly process that requires employees with extensive product knowledge.

The Challenge

1. Communicate with approximately 300 suppliers to obtain UPC codes for approximately 65,000 part numbers – which grew to over 100,000 during the project
2. Create new files to contain UPC information
3. Create an upload process to load UPC data on the AS400 received from suppliers
4. Modify all software to use UPC data
5. Create a dashboard report showing progress and distribute to all agents
6. Create an automated on-going process to maintain UPC codes

The Solution

To obtain Universal Product codes (UPC) for all internal items from the suppliers in order to eliminate the need for "agent to the internal part number" translation tables.

A file was sent to each supplier containing a list of the products they supply; the internal part number; the manufacturer's item number, and a field for them to supply the appropriate UPC.

The Benefit

Once the data was received from the suppliers, the data needed to be matched to the internal Part Master. Because of the large volume of data, the need for accuracy, and the scarcity of client employee resources there was a need to automate the matching to the Part Master.

The Item Matching Tool was designed as a desktop application written in Visual Basic that resides on the user's PC and connects to a SQL Server Database. The data was formatted, checked, and an output file generated for uploading to the internal master files through an application designed specifically for the AS400.

Once approved, the data was uploaded into the AS400 using programs written in RPGIV and Java.

What's a UPC Bar Code?

"UPC" stands for Universal Product Code. UPC bar codes were originally created to help grocery stores speed up the checkout process and keep better track of inventory, but the system quickly spread to all other retail products because it was so successful.

UPCs originate with an organization called the Uniform Code Council (UCC). A manufacturer applies to the UCC for permission to enter the UPC system. The manufacturer pays an annual fee for the privilege. In return, the UCC issues the manufacturer a six-digit manufacturer identification number and provides guidelines on how to use it.