WINDWARD

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> *—David Boodey, Vice President of Technology*

# RepLink "Sales Away" with Windward Studios

The Company

Managing a database of 50,000 products from 500+ brands is a demanding task. Combine that rich data with more than 300 rep companies, 100 suppliers, and 50 direct buyers worldwide who need secure, reliable access to the database, and you have a picture of the intricate situation that RepLink, a leader in incentive market sales tools, faces every day.

Minneapolis-based RepLink™ services both the companies that put together incentive programs offering branded merchandise and the professional incentives buyers who purchase this merchandise.

RepLink's impressive merchandiser list includes Sony®, Bulova® Watch, Movado™, Canon USA™, Casio®, Coleman™, Godiva®, and Omaha Steaks®, to name just a few, and nearly 100% of these companies' rep organizations use its system.

The Challenge

The incentives industry faces a unique challenge because the manufacturers all have their own
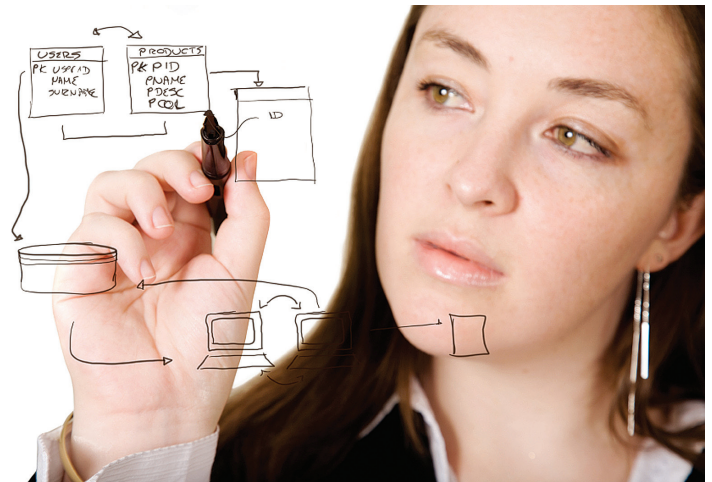
internal databases, but the reps need to access this data as a unified resource. That's where RepLink comes in. RepLink gives manufacturers the ability to combine their product database information into a single database, which the reps can easily access and navigate.

Up until a few years ago, this process was distributed. Suppliers have local versions of their databases, and they would upload their databases to be merged with RepLink's central server. The reps would

then download updates – product data from the suppliers who have authorized them to see their products – to their local databases.

But when RepLink began transitioning from being a distributed system of desktop applications to a central Web-based system, the company needed to find a new reporting solution.

One of the main functions of the RepLink system is to generate sales proposals. Because most end users have Microsoft® Office on their computers, RepLink creates those templates in Microsoft Word. Therefore, when considering how best to transition to the Web, RepLink needed to meet two main criteria.

"First, we had a built-in base of team members familiar with using Word, and they weren't programmers," said David Boodey, RepLink's Vice President of Technology. "These team members would be creating templates, and we needed a tool they could get up to speed on quickly.

About RepLink

Minneapolis-based RepLink is the primary communication and sales tool for the incentive market. Nearly every major brand name supplier in the incentive industry and 100% of their rep organizations use RepLink every day for managing, sourcing, presenting and buying merchandise and services.

"Second -- a very big factor -- we had a large library of existing templates we used for our Word Automation solution," he added. "We needed to be able to reuse all the effort that had gone into creating them, because we were replicating some fairly complicated forms."

The Solution

The developers began investigating a number of reporting tools, including Microsoft's SQL Server® Reporting Services, SAP® Crystal Reports, Data Dynamics ActiveReports®, Windward, and a couple of small third-party solutions. Crystal Reports was "prohibitively expensive," said Boodey, but cost wasn't the only factor he evaluated. He also considered scalability, quality of development support and ease of template creation.

RepLink selected Windward as its reporting tool primarily because Windward enables any user, technical or non-technical, to design reports using an easy-to-use add-in for Microsoft Word, Excel®, or PowerPoint® called AutoTag. Report designers simply open the desired Microsoft Office program and create their own templates.

The Achievements

With one primary developer, RepLink integrated its new reporting solution quickly, without losing valuable running time.

Additionally, time and cost savings are ongoing.

"There was tremendous time savings in being able to take the layouts of the old templates and just have to make minor hooks into Windward data sources and just replace the Word form fields we were using with Windward tags," Boodey said.

"The time savings garnered by not having to have someone redo the more complicated table layouts was huge."

Plus in RepLink, as in many organizations, the IT staffers typically are more expensive than the non-IT staffers, so RepLink saves money by allowing the non-IT employees to create reports. That's not the only important reason for having non-IT staff in charge of report design.

"Non-programmers have a better aesthetic," Boodey said. "They bring to the process a better idea of what the report layout should look like. That helps us serve our customers better."

Evelyn Gray is a first-hand example of this. She had no programming background, and she relies on Windward to get the job done. It would be impractical for this support rep to learn to write code or program in another software application such as Crystal Reports.

About Windward

For businesses in document-intensive industries, Windward Studios is the document generation and reporting software company that empowers business professionals to create beautiful, professional reports. Create custom reports with Microsoft Office as your design tool and a Java or .NET engine that connects to virtually any data source. Windward has been delighting customers since 2004.

Microsoft Word with AutoTag, on the other hand, is straightforward, and Gray didn't have to learn to use a new program to create new templates or update archived ones. If Gray has any questions, she contacts the support team at Windward, whose response time she calls "awesome."

"Customer service is outstanding," Gray said. "Windward does exactly what we need it to do."

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