

CASE STUDY:  
LENOX



IMPLEMENTING A GLOBAL  
PRODUCTIVITY AND QUALITY  
IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

AssurX



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## IMPLEMENTING A GLOBAL PRODUCTIVITY AND QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

The director of quality for a company that has been a household name in American living rooms for more than a century knew he faced a big challenge finding and installing a global CAPA (Corrective and Preventive Action) system for his firm. The ambitious goals included no less than pulling together thousands of employees and vendors spread across more than 25 countries and transforming them into a more efficient unit with the ability to keep even tighter control on already high quality standards and empower key personnel to make important decisions in real-time.

“Our operations are so geographically dispersed,” David Sommers, Director of Quality at Lenox Inc. noted. For example, the world renowned manufacturer and retailer of fine china dinnerware, glassware and silverware employs 200 people at its Lawrenceville, New Jersey headquarters, but there are also more than 3,000 other employees around the globe – not to mention scores of vendors scattered in almost every locale imaginable.

Add to that a shift at Lenox where outsourced work now comprises about 75 percent of all operations – especially in Europe and Asia — where it was 25 percent just five years ago. On top of that, Lenox is a business that adds some 1,000 new product SKUs each year, and typically has between 10,000 and 20,000 active at any given time.

It all translates into a successful business with \$165 million in annual sales as of January 2002, but also a tough logistical day-to-day challenge, Mr. Sommers said.

### The Lenox Challenge

That challenge included finding the most efficient way to keep a firm control on quality and electronically connect all Lenox team members in key areas, including:

- **Tracking expenses for shipments that arrive defective or otherwise don't meet Lenox's superior quality standards.**

As the provider of fine china to the White House for decades, maintaining a high quality standard is core to the mission at Lenox, Mr. Sommers said. In addition to the White House, Lenox tableware is at home in the vice president's official residence, more than 300 U.S. embassies, and more than half of the governors' mansions. Its giftware has been selected for presentation to dignitaries by the U.S. Congress and U.S. Department of State, among others. Its products are in the permanent collections of America's most prestigious cultural institutions, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and have been the centerpieces in exhibitions of American decorative arts. But Lenox is perhaps even more proud of the role it continues to play in millions of American dining rooms every day, Mr. Sommers said.

- **Coordinating reports in the functional test lab.** Mr. Sommers faced a situation where those thousands of reports were stored on paper – and remote access was extremely difficult and time-consuming.
- **Disseminating the quality inspection reports.** These are conducted in numerous overseas locations by independent service providers.
- **Factory and vendor qualification.** This is an especially important consideration to Lenox because they work with so many outside vendors and firms. Everyone has to have the same high quality standard or they shouldn't be associated with the Lenox brand, Mr. Sommers said.

“There are an enormous amount of other applications we are finding that we can add for very little additional financial investment. Our use of CATSWeb is going to continue to grow substantially.”

### Lenox Kicks the Tires of CAPA Providers

After a thorough search that included a hard, critical look at several global CAPA providers, Sommers and Lenox went with CATSWeb® from AssurX Inc.

AssurX, Inc., is a leading global CAPA system provider throughout the world. In 1998, AssurX

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made the commitment to re-engineer its popular iidsCATS client/server product and replace it with a compatible product based on pure Internet architecture. CATSWeb was launched in 2000, making it the first Web-based CAPA tracking system on the market. AssurX built a myriad of functionality into CATSWeb including universal e-mail integration that allows for the use of any existing e-mail system, strict security controls, the ability to attach any types of files including documents, drawings, images and spreadsheets. CATSWeb was designed from the ground up to easily integrate with other information systems including ERP, Manufacturing Execution Systems (MES), Supply Chain Management, Customer Relationship Management and custom corporate systems.

This gives companies the ability to harness the power of browser-based systems, reduce IT costs, lower the learning curve for new users, and redirect valuable IT resources to more critical projects within the organization. It also means that proprietary client-side software is a thing of the past; all that is required now is a simple Internet browser.

Leveraging CATSWeb is a decision Mr. Sommers feels even better about with each passing day, he said. Among his main reasons for selecting CATSWeb, Mr. Sommers cited:

- It's ease of use when it comes to adding new users to the software – that's a big issue for Lenox especially with the many vendors it works with. "CATSWeb's concurrent license helps us tremendously when it comes to flexibility of usage," Mr. Sommers said. AssurX is the first company to offer true zero-client architecture in CAPA systems. With 100% pure HTML being sent to the browser, compatibility, reliability and security problems disappear. Firms with mixed environments of Windows, UNIX, Linux and Macintoshes can freely collaborate.

- It's utility in new and even unexpected applications. Lenox has added CATSWeb to several applications since it was first installed, and anticipates adding several more including storage and processing of consumer and customer complaints and returns – Lenox has already placed an order for additional licenses in addition to the 100-plus who use it on a daily basis now, Mr. Sommers noted. They may also add key vendors as affiliate users. "There are an enormous amount of other applications we are finding that we can add for very little additional financial investment," Mr. Sommers said. Because CATSWeb is an n-tier application, the system can grow with the organization. The system can be used in a single-server configuration, or can be expanded to a multiple-server clustered system. CATSWeb utilizes either Microsoft SQL Server 7 or 2000, or Oracle 9i – both of which are very robust and highly scalable database platforms.

Mr. Sommers also praised the easy, "simple" installation that was bolstered by strong support from AssurX. Since CATSWeb doesn't require any client-side software installation, validation is only required on the application server.

Mr. Sommers said he has been impressed by CATSWeb's flexibility in countless areas, including designing forms. "It is feature packed, with email notification and escalation" as needed to handle important issues that could otherwise be missed. For example, when safety issues are involved Lenox uses CATSWeb to escalate for signatures so everyone who needs to know is aware of critical product testing and approval status.

### Increasing Control with CATSWeb

CATSWeb has been a huge help in tackling Lenox's requirements for tracking expenses, accessing lab results and inspector reports, and controlling factory and vendor specifications. Mr. Sommers

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elaborated on how CATSWeb has helped in each situation:

- **Tracking expenses associated with shipment quality:** CATSWeb has been an effective communications tool that allows product supervisors at remote locations to view and discuss remediation with vendors and other partners in Product Discrepancy Reports (PDRs) coming from distribution centers around the world. This allows Lenox to more effectively track product quality on arrival and take quicker steps to address a quality control issue, Mr. Sommers said. Before CATSWeb, Mr. Sommers said the PDR process was especially cumbersome, with easily a half a dozen email messages involved around each one. "There was lots of paper and virtually no record or way to tell really where anything was in the process," he said.
- **Producing and distributing functional test results:** Lenox conducts functional testing on many of its products such as cookware to make certain they are working properly, Sommers said. With the arrival of CATSWeb, Lenox has been able to put those reports on the Internet and share them as needed with the appropriate product vendor or design group to more quickly fix any fundamental product deficiencies.
- **Overseas product inspections:** With such far-flung operations, CATSWeb has emerged as particularly useful as a flexible repository for all inspection reports. For example, CATSWeb has helped Lenox track over/under quantity shipments and give the company the ability to rectify mistakes much more quickly than before, Mr. Sommers said.
- **Factory and vendor audits:** CATSWeb has allowed Lenox to tighten their factory and vendor qualification process and share that information instantly with appropriate team members. For example, auditors now photograph stock shapes and other product and operational visuals and attach those to

their audit reports. Team members anywhere in the world, if cleared to access the information, can literally see how the vendor and factory operate.

"Our use of CATSWeb is going to continue to grow substantially," Mr. Sommers said.

### CONCLUSION

A good CAPA program is a sound business strategy that can translate into a new competitive advantage, experts agree. A global CAPA solution provides information and visibility throughout the entire organization in real-time. Important decisions and vital information are no longer isolated in the quality assurance department. By implementing a closed-loop CAPA system, firms can solve problems before they become bigger issues, streamline and make more efficient many aspects of their operations, and control their own destiny in today's highly competitive marketplace.

For firms that want to streamline operations, increase efficiencies, improve decision-making capabilities, protect product quality and share key information in real-time, a global CAPA solution like CATSWeb from AssurX is a critical tool.

*For more information about how you can leverage CATSWeb to improve your business, or to request a live online demo, please call 408-778-1376, ext. 705.*

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