

Customer Profile

iWay Software enables online, real-time, and batch integration of information assets, internal business processes, and external business partners all from a single platform.

AkzoNobel

Snapshot

Organization

AkzoNobel is the world's largest paints and coatings company, and a world-leading chemicals producer.

The Challenge

Make it easier for suppliers, customers, and internal business units using various ERP systems to exchange information, as well as facilitate vendor-managed inventory and other eBusiness scenarios.

The Strategy

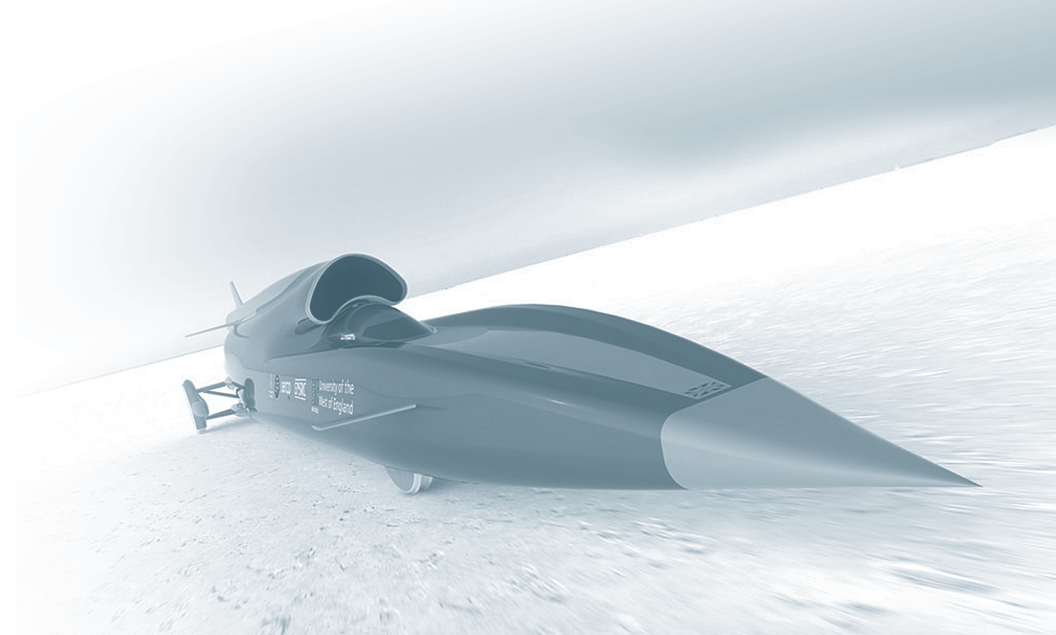
Eliminate burdensome homegrown supply-chain management systems and standardize on iWay for all B2B processes.

The Results

iWay Trading Partner Manager and iWay Activity Monitor allow AkzoNobel to manage B2B communications with multiple partners using a large number of different message sets and protocols. The elimination of hand coding saves the company significant expenses, and AkzoNobel can focus on relationships instead of integration scenarios.

Information Builders Solution

iWay Service Manager, Trading Partner Manager, Activity Monitor, Adapters, WebFOCUS, and Professional Services.



Designed to break the 1,000-mph speed barrier, the Bloodhound SSC prototype car is coated with aerospace coatings from AkzoNobel, a company that relies on iWay Software for managing its many business relationships.

Integrating a Broad Palette of Trading Partners

World's Largest Paint Company Uses iWay to Optimize B2B Relationships

AkzoNobel, the world's largest paints and coatings company, brings color to the world with some of the best-known brands in the decorative coatings business. The company is also a global leader in performance coatings such as car refinishes and industrial finishes, and in specialty chemicals essential to everything from ice cream to soap.

Managing relationships with its partners and distributors around the globe is a vital business component that enables AkzoNobel to bring its many worldwide brands to life. To this end, AkzoNobel relies on iWay Trading Partner Manager to connect all its business units worldwide, as well as to forge reliable links with suppliers, transportation companies, and customers across multiple trading networks.

"Our overriding objective is to make it easier for our partners to do business with us," says Bas Van Amerom, eSupply-chain manager at AkzoNobel. "We wanted

“iWay Trading Partner Manager simplifies our relationships. It’s boosting productivity and reducing costs for us.”

our suppliers to be able to simply connect once. iWay Trading Partner Manager simplifies our relationships. It’s boosting productivity and reducing costs for us.”

Creating Standard Interfaces Across the IT Spectrum

AkzoNobel has long been driven by the belief that the future belongs to those smart enough to challenge it. Years ago, the company confronted its own supply-chain processes with the concept of vendor-managed inventory (VMI). The model places suppliers (for materials such as pigments and resin) in the position of owning the inventory stock that AkzoNobel uses to create its products.

“The benefit of VMI for us is that inventory stock no longer impacts our working capital,” Van Amerom explains. “We have less stock to manage, meaning lower carrying costs. The benefit for suppliers is that they can schedule deliveries whenever they want to optimize quantities.

“It is up to them to make sure we have enough supplies, based on what’s currently there and what we forecast to be using in our production runs. Lowering the required physical stock has advantages to everybody in the supply chain.”

VMI works well in theory, but this lean supply-chain concept implies formidable integration challenges. AkzoNobel is globally organized into 18 business units. Suppliers and customers connect to these business units via a variety of enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems. AkzoNobel needed a central hub to facilitate these connections.

AkzoNobel set out to build its own platform to act as a communication hub to optimize trading-partner relationships among suppliers, buyers, and internal business units. “Our homegrown solution, based on an early version of Microsoft BizTalk Server, helped us support a lot of eBusiness scenarios,” Van Amerom says. “However, it required a lot of attention. It was a full-time job keeping it maintained and updated. We’re not a software company, so this is not our core competency.”

AkzoNobel turned to Information Builders for help, leading to a joint development project that advanced the technology for both parties. “Information Builders agreed to team with us to create what is now known as iWay Trading Partner Manager,” explains Van Amerom. “They brought the technical expertise, and we helped drive product development by providing business knowledge and a real-world scenario. We standardized on iWay for B2B and contributed to the development of iWay Trading Partner Manager.”

Now part of iWay’s high-performance Business-to-Business (B2B) Suite, iWay Trading Partner Manager manages information and infrastructure among trading partners by making B2B interactions a natural extension of an organization’s service-oriented architecture (SOA) efforts. It also simplifies the management of complex environments within an organization.

Reducing Costs in Broad Brushstrokes

With help from Information Builders Professional Services, AkzoNobel standardized on iWay. Within six months they were testing system-to-system interfaces via Trading Partner Manager. “The installation went well,” Van Amerom affirms. “Information Builders consultants are very knowledgeable. We did a fresh install on Windows servers and found iWay to be very flexible in the way it can be set up.”

“We have an ongoing relationship with Information Builders to handle development. That grants us the luxury of not needing to be overly concerned with becoming IT experts. We can leave the technical details to them and focus on improving our business relationships.”

iWay Trading Partner Manager allows AkzoNobel to effectively manage B2B communications with multiple partners using a large number of different message sets and protocols. “Now we can easily connect to partners no matter what kind of system they are using,” Van Amerom continues. “We are adding new connections all the time.”

The integration software provides an easy gateway to set up and maintain a small or large number of partner relationships in a highly reliable framework. This makes it very easy to reuse existing connections. “For example, once we have a connection with an SAP system internally and we want to add a new partner, we simply make a database entry,” Van Amerom explains. “There is no configuration necessary on our part. We add them to the database and it works. iWay lets us focus on relationships rather than integration.”

Formerly, establishing an interface with a new vendor could take AkzoNobel many days of coding. iWay has optimized that process. The cost savings associated with creating these interfaces through iWay is substantial.

Van Amerom has also been able to reduce the support effort because of the new system. “Because we now have standard, vendor-supported middleware instead of a homegrown system, maintenance takes much less effort,” he says.

Filling the Cracks in Critical Business Processes

Without monitoring, it is difficult to detect when something has gone wrong in a business process. Thus, AkzoNobel also uses iWay Activity Monitor to fine-tune the exchange of information and to make sure business-critical processes, such as warehouse picking orders, are done properly.

iWay Activity Monitor can not only answer specific business questions based on measurements, but also apply analytical techniques to validate correlations, report on impacts, detect root causes, and make predictions.

“If we get a pick order through SAP from an internal customer to an external warehouse and the order is not sent, it can lead to poor customer relationships,” Van Amerom says. “We need to make sure the messaging process is accurate. Activity Monitor is much more than a message gateway. It has accountability, management, and auditing all wrapped into the solution. If anything goes wrong, we can proactively notify the recipient and the sender, letting them know that we are on top of the issue and will have a resolution.”

By integrating business activity monitoring (BAM) and business intelligence (BI) technology, Activity Monitor helps administrators to view, monitor, and report on iWay processes. It captures end-to-end transaction and workflow data across multiple applications and business units, summarizing and displaying trading-partner metrics so supply-chain managers can keep an eye on B2B activity. For example, green flags in the Activity Monitor console indicate messages that are correctly and accurately sent while red flags reveal issues that need to be addressed. The Activity Monitor also sends e-mail alerts to notify all relevant parties if something goes wrong, and includes a number of standard reports to summarize trading partner activity.

Find Out More

To see how we can help you succeed, visit us at iwaysoftware.com, e-mail us at info@iWaySoftware.com, or in the U.S. and Canada, call toll-free **(866) 297-4929**.

"iWay Activity Monitor has enabled reporting capabilities that we didn't previously have," Van Amerom says. "We can drill into messages to provide information and do incident management."

Looking ahead, AkzoNobel plans to create a standard internal communications layer among corporate functions and business units. "We want to be the message broker not just for B2B but also for application-to-application interfaces," Van Amerom explains. "For example, when central HR needs information from various HR systems in the business units, we want them to be able to come to us to set up the connections. iWay Business Process Automation technology can facilitate these goals," he adds.

"iWay is making a huge difference by enabling us to easily connect to our suppliers and customers, as well as to our many business units," Van Amerom says. "We have an ongoing relationship with Information Builders to handle development. That grants us the luxury of not needing to be overly concerned with becoming IT experts. We can leave the technical details to them and focus on improving our business relationships."

About Information Builders

Information Builders' award-winning combination of business intelligence and enterprise integration software has been providing innovative solutions to more than 12,000 customers for the past 30 years. WebFOCUS is the world's most widely utilized business intelligence platform. It provides the security, scalability, and flexibility needed at every level of global extended enterprises. Its simplicity helps create executive, analytical, and operational applications that reach dozens to millions of users. Information Builders subsidiary iWay Software provides state-of-the-art, multi-purpose integration engines that address all SOA, application, data, and information management requirements. Its integration adapters have been adopted by the leading software platform providers. Together, these products give Information Builders' customers the ability to live up to the company motto: Your business. No barriers.

Information Builders' customers include most of the Fortune 100 and U.S. federal government agencies. Headquartered in New York City with 90 offices worldwide, the company employs 1,400 people and has more than 350 business partners.

About iWay Software

iWay Software, an Information Builders company and the world's leading adapter vendor, accelerates business integration by providing tools that make service-oriented architectures easy to implement. Clients achieve short-term ROI by using iWay to reduce custom programming and to solve problems quickly, while incrementally creating an architecture that supports long-term projects. The biggest names in software, including BEA, Microsoft, and SAP, use iWay adapters to simplify access to ERP and CRM systems, messaging, legacy systems, e-business protocols like AS2 and ebXML, and more. Additional message transformation and data integration make iWay a natural integration choice – standalone or with other middleware.



Corporate Headquarters Two Penn Plaza, New York, NY 10121-2898 (866) 297-4929
iwaysoftware.com info@iwaysoftware.com
For International Inquiries +1(212) 330-1700

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