

Cooperative Electric Energy Utilities Supply

CEE-US turns to Persona for Internet-based order entry.

"We wanted to provide our users with the capability to do order entry over the Internet," said Jay Trapp, Information Systems Manager for the Cooperative Electric Energy Utilities Supply (CEE-US). "However, the Telnet approach we had been using presented a number of security issues for us." Trapp is responsible for the implementation and maintenance of the CEE-US technology systems. He supports 25 internal employees, as well as over two dozen purchasers located at electric co-ops throughout South Carolina.

BACKGROUND

Cooperative Electric Energy Utilities Supply, located in West Columbia, S.C., is the purchasing arm for the 24 electric co-ops in South Carolina serving 494,000 customers (about 70 percent of the state's population). CEE-US maintains a \$7.5 million inventory that includes arrestors, conductors, transformers, meters, insulators, and more. The company had implemented a SCO Unix Open Server system via Wyse terminal emulation to allow 50 purchasers located at the cooperatives to make necessary purchases from CEE-US' centralised inventory.

CHALLENGES

Trapp said, "Initially, we considered an encrypted Telnet program, but using such a program turned out to present a major hurdle. It meant that I would have had to personally go to every site to install the client so that the users could use Telnet, encrypted securely over the Internet."

"I didn't have the staff or resources to go to every location and install the client for 50 desktops," Trapp explained. Because customer sites are spread throughout South Carolina, visiting each site to install the necessary Telnet client would have taken weeks. "What I really needed was a product that demanded zero administration, and Persona was the right fit," added Trapp.



Cost was another key concern. "Our co-op users are probably only going to spend an hour maximum per day using the system," said Trapp. "I really could not cost-justify spending several hundred dollars per client for that minimal amount of time."

SOLUTIONS AND BENEFITS

"The sales staff were sensitive to my cost issues," stated Trapp. CEE-US purchased a Persona Starter Kit, which provided enough user licenses to allow ten users to work simultaneously and saved the company a substantial amount of money compared with purchasing 50 individual user licenses.

CEE-US is using Persona Insight 3.1 to add remote order entry capabilities to their current system. The company had already implemented a wholesale distribution software program called FACTS which handles inventory control, payroll, and other accounting-related business functions. "Instant access is the key benefit for our users," said Trapp. "Previously, whenever they wanted to get on our system, I had to schedule a visit to their site in order to install the software and configure their system. Now they just visit our Web site, and I never have to interrupt their workflow to get them set up. The initial response has been really positive."

At the site, users access ordering capabilities through a standard text-based "green screen" embedded within the Web page. Persona is set up to run an automated script to bypass the normal sign-in process and allow the user to sign in directly to the FACTS system.

Persona allowed each system user to receive a user name and password through the CEE-US Internet site. "At the point that the user logs on, the system has to issue the user name and password, and that can be done sitting at my desk," said Trapp. Because Persona only requires a Java-compatible browser (such as Netscape or Internet Explorer),* compatibility issues at the user's side were minimised.



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