

KIDS II

Leading toy company extends enterprise capabilities to shipping with LABELVIEW and SENTINEL

Solution Overview

Industry

Educational Toys

Application

Shipping

Teklynx Software Products

Label Design Software
LABELVIEW

ERP/Host Connectivity Software
SENTINEL Print Pack

ERP System

Mapics with Oracle 8i

Hardware

HP NetServer LH6000
Zebra 170 Xill printers

Kids II, a leading children's educational toy company, had a problem that every company wants -- its product shipment volume was growing so fast that its ability to get product out the door was overwhelmed. Sometimes requiring 35,000 unique shipping labels in a four hour span, Kids II's label printing operation was holding up the shipping process.

Database Administrator, Prasad Yalamanchili, decided to address the issue and researched alternative labeling solutions. After evaluating almost 50 products, he decided on LABELVIEW™ label design software with SENTINEL™ Print Pack connectivity software, both from TEKLYNX®. Now, Kids II has a high-performance label design and printing operation that is tightly integrated with its Oracle and Mapics enterprise systems.

In 1969, Kids II created the Original Infant Foam Bath Aid, which was designed to make bathing a safer and more comfortable experience for parents and babies. Today, Kids II provides parents and caregivers with "smart" toys that encourage babies to develop and to explore the world around them. Located in Alpharetta, Georgia, Kids II distributes its products in nearly every country in the world, providing parents and their children with high quality, innovative products. Constant research and development focus groups, and work with child development experts help ensure that Kids II continues to lead the educational toy market.

Kids II products are available through hundreds of retail outlets in North America, including Amazon.com, FAO Schwarz, Kohl's, Learning Express, Target, Wal-Mart and Zany Brainy, as well as through several international distributors. The company services these customers through its main warehouse in Georgia and two additional North American warehouses in Pennsylvania and California, as well as through direct shipping arrangements with its suppliers in the Far East.

As the company grew, Kids II found that it had to extend its innovative thinking to its enterprise systems, order fulfillment and shipping operations. The company invested heavily in advanced enterprise systems from Oracle and Mapics, and developed several custom applications in-house for marketing and sales to address specialized needs. It also developed a common system for all reports that automatically generates nightly Web-based management reports.

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Prasad Yalamanchili
Database Administrator
Kids II

Translating enterprise efficiency to shipping efficiency

Kids II was benefiting from its investments in enterprise systems but it was unable to carry this efficiency through to its shipping operations. Although the company was happy with the hardware aspects of its labeling operation, Zebra printers and Symbol scanners, the standalone label design and printing software package did not have the required enterprise integration or capacity to support high-volume label print runs.

Besides not being able to keep up with the volume, the disconnect from the enterprise system caused other problems, including a chronic problem of labels that were printed out of sequence. It was time consuming and expensive to go through a manual checking process to reconcile the shipping labels with the pick list. Also, as volume increased, the print quality of the labels suffered, resulting in unacceptable bar codes and handling problems for Kids II customers.

In November of 2001, Yalamanchili decided to replace the labeling software. He spent three weeks reviewing 48 software packages from a number of suppliers. His research pointed him towards TEKLYNX. “I found out that TEKLYNX is the leader in bar code labeling software and that some of the other label software companies embed TEKLYNX label technology into their products. I decided to go to the source,” commented Yalamanchili. He selected TEKLYNX’ LABELVIEW label design software because it is user friendly and employs familiar drag-and-drop design features. “TEKLYNX is clearly going in the right direction,” continued Yalamanchili.

Fast and easy label design is important to Kids II since each of its large customers has its own design requirements. As a result, Kids II maintains about 40 different label designs in different formats and sizes. “We wanted a label design program that anybody could use,” he continued. Now, using previously designed labels or templates, new labels can be in production in less than 30 minutes after they’ve been approved.

The label design software was just the first step, however. Yalamanchili was looking for a print server that would tap into the power of the Kids II enterprise systems. For this he also turned to TEKLYNX for the SENTINEL Print Pack S/2. SENTINEL Print Pack closely integrates with enterprise and other database systems by monitoring special print folders and automatically printing labels when the enterprise system sends information to the folders.

Up and running in 25 days

Once the decision was made, the installation went smoothly. Yalamanchili completed his research in November, installed the software in December, and was operational in January – 25 days later.

Now, the label printing operation has been completely revamped. Orders come through Kids II’s electronic data interchange (EDI) system or through manual order entries. Inventory levels are checked and the pick lists are printed out. A Microsoft Access database taps the Oracle database to get all of the shipping information for the labels. SENTINEL monitors the Access database and when it sees a label print file, it is ready to automatically produce the correct LABELVIEW

For More Information

For more information about Teklynx products or services, please visit our web site or call us at (414) 577-3900 in the US or Canada. Outside the 50 United States and Canada, please contact Teklynx at +33 562-601-080. To access information via the World Wide Web, go to:

<http://www.teklynx.eu.com/>

<http://www.teklynx.com/>

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designed label. The shipping clerk enters the pick list number and designates a printer and SENTINEL produces the labels.

SENTINEL Print Pack monitors both the data and the labels to bring them together. "We take a superset of all of the information that would be needed for any label and put it into a flat file. Then the data is always available for any design that we're using," continued Yalamanchili. This is important since so many different labels are used. In addition, each carton receives a unique UCC (Unified Commercial Code) identifier and sequence number. In some instance cartons are marked with individual store addresses so retailers can break the shipments and send them on to their network of retail outlets.

Said Yalamanchili, "The best thing about SENTINEL is that it reduces the load on our programmers. We define the data file and the label design so we don't have to do a lot of custom programming. A request for a new label comes in and we can ship it within an hour."

High-volume label printing is not a problem

Through tighter integration and specialized SENTINEL features, Kids II is able to meet its volume printing demands, as well. The company regularly prints 35,000 labels in four hours which enables it to ship the same day an order comes in. "We could not do that before," commented Yalamanchili. Since SENTINEL is designed from the ground up for high-volume printing, it includes other features, as well. "With SENTINEL we can define our own delimiters so we can assign a large order to several printers and have them print simultaneously without losing track of the sequence numbers," he continued. "Imagine how much time we save by avoiding the sequence and label errors that we used to have to deal with."

Errors have been virtually eliminated. Contributing to the error reduction is the print quality of the labels. "With some software, when the speed of the label printing goes up, the quality decreases. This causes calls and chargebacks because our customers' receiving operations have trouble scanning the bar codes. Because customers don't have any trouble scanning the labels, chargebacks are reduced to almost nothing," said Yalamanchili.

Extending SENTINEL Print Pack to the enterprise

Kids II is extending SENTINEL integration to its other U.S. warehouses and expects to have the project completed by the end of summer. This implementation will use the Internet and flat files that will make the most efficient use of network resources. In addition, Kids II may take advantage of SENTINEL Print Pack's flexibility and create an extranet that enables its Far East suppliers to directly ship to customers using the SENTINEL system.

"We're growing and want to use the latest technology to keep our productivity high and increase our ROI. We make sure the software we select is the latest but we didn't buy SENTINEL to use for only one or two years. SENTINEL's heading in the right direction for our growth," concluded Yalamanchili.