NUTLAND CARPET ACCESSORIES

The Project

Successful, Independent, and family run, Nutland Carpet Accessories are a leading distributor of commercial flooring, carpets, vinyl and flooring accessories to the flooring trade.

Having been an early adopter of business systems they were keen to continue this trend by enhancing their IBM i based systems to provide documents in PDF format so that their suppliers and customers could receive these automatically by mail, print, or email.

Background

Documents generated on the IBM i have historically been printed using expensive IBM line printers on pre-printed fan fold stationery. Many of the documents are printed on multi-part stationery with copies given to customers and physical copies kept in the offices for compliance and archive.

The printers are old, hard to find spares for, noisy, and large - taking up valuable office space.
In addition, the quality of dot matrix print is poor making documents difficult to read.

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The Requirements

A system that enabled documents (previously only printable using legacy line printers); to be generated as full colour graphical PDF documents, no longer constrained by pre-printed stationery or paper size.

Furthermore, it needed to be possible to print, email, or mail any document to any supplier or customer based on their own preferences, and those of Nutland Carpet Accessories.

Office copies previously required files of historical documents, but the new system would streamline this with a digital archive where they could be backed up for as long as necessary.

A graphical dashboard was created to enable an audit of all actions taken and to enable documents to be searched and for copies made, as necessary.

The Challenge

Because the system encompassed all documents generated by the IBM i system it was logical that the demands of one area of the business might be very different to another.

For example, on the trade counters, documents needed to be generated instantly so that customers were not waiting whilst files were created. A zero-poll system was implemented so that the documents were generated even as the sale was being finalised.

Whilst moving from multipart stationery to plain paper was a key driver of the project, it was considered important to retain some of the benefits of multipart stationery, the different coloured copies for different purposes.

Layout files were created which allowed the whole colour tint of a document to be modified and enabling different copies to be created in different colours all whilst using plain paper stock.

The KFA Solution

Using a multidisciplinary team, a blended approach to the development was taken so that the strengths of the IBM i, its reliability, speed, and familiarity; was paired with a new windows service and web app developed using C# in .netcore to provide a newly developed dashboard running on a windows server.

The documents were designed in Crystal Reports with a trigger from the IBM i initiating the production of the PDF.

Deeply integrated into the existing IBM i solution, the background service creates, files and emails documents without any change to business as usual. In addition, a dashboard accessible from any browser allows configuration of the system so that any actions may be taken with any document or its copies.

A file-based archive means that copies of documents no longer need to be printed and a search facility allows any document to be quickly located.

The Outcome

Nutland Carpet Accessories retain the power of their IBM i system and bring to it a thoroughly modern printing experience. Customers and Suppliers can receive documents the way that they want to with the majority expected to opt for email copies, saving time and paper.

Fully graphical documents means that stocks of pre-printed stationary no longer need to be held and that branding, and design can be changed in line with business needs.

For those customers for whom mailed correspondence remains a must, an integration with a third-party mailing provider provides an efficient solution.

And those line printers? Now that they are no longer needed, the space they took in the office has been freed up.

The project was a huge success and delivered on time and with the introduction of the KFA developed dashboard the added potential to continue to modernise their IBM i application.

The Future

The KFA team are currently working on new project ideas for Nutland Carpets including:

- Enhancements to the dashboard to provide reporting over the IBM i with export to Excel.

- A new MTD solution to take data from the IBM i and post directly to HMRC using the KFA developed Magic Tax bridging software.

- The automation of product pricing through the dashboard.

"KFA have been our IT provider for 25 years now (since 1998).
There have been many modifications and updates over the years to adapt to changes in our requirements, recently taking the IBM platform to the cloud and now they are helping us convert our paper invoices/credits & statements to electronic output.

We are very proud that our company is 50 years old this year & we owe so much to the people at KFA for keeping our business running smoothly behind the scenes, so thank you KFA we couldn't have done it without you!"

James Smith – Director, Nutland Carpet Accessories