Manufacturer of Factory Automation Improves Cost Efficiency and Solves Support Challenge with Existing MDM Solution

Company:

Balluff

Industry:

Manufacturing

Region:

Germany

Solution:

Product MDM (SaaS)

Executive Summary

Balluff manufactures components and solutions for factory automation, such as sensors and networking technologies. The company with headquarters in Stuttgart (Germany) has been in operation for over a hundred years, is present in over 60 countries and employs around 4,000 people.

With the growing complexity of their products, Balluff was experiencing challenges in managing diverse product information, handling customer inquiries efficiently and maintaining effective knowledge management in a global and technology-driven context.

The solution involved leveraging their existing master data management (MDM) solution and integrating new technologies to enhance customer support, translations and streamline internal processes, which has helped them provide consistent data across all their communication channels.

Simultaneously, the company moved its MDM to a SaaS environment for better IT security and efficiency.

The Business Impact

Cost efficiency and improved customer experience. Utilizing the existing MDM for content management was a much more cost-efficient solution than implementing a new software from scratch and integrating it into the existing architecture.

Effective management of product-related content for both the sales and service departments has cut response times through enhanced accessibility, enabling users to search for information based on specific products, keywords or document types.

The upgraded MDM solution also facilitates the integration of automated translation tools.

Future plans involve enhanced content, such as augmented reality data, and establishing information governance, harmonizing data models and ensuring transparency in the flow of data.

Challenge

Documentation and knowledge management. Given the complex product portfolio, Balluff needed an efficient way of managing and organizing product-related documentation and knowledge, including instruction updates, application notes and technical support instructions, which had to be made more available to both sales teams and customers.

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Also, the internal processes needed to be optimized. For example, data sheet production time in the past took up to four weeks when there were changes to the 60,000 components Balluff produces.

Support. Balluff receives a significant number of phone calls, emails and support tickets from customers. However, a lot of these requests are repetitive questions that could be handled with an efficient system for frequently asked questions. The former approach involved manually answering customer inquiries, which was not sustainable.

Translation. Balluff operates in about 60 markets, necessitating efficient and quick translation services to support international customers.

Any new solution had to be seamlessly integrated into the company's existing systems, such as SAP and other tools used for product information management.

Solution

Existing software integration. Balluff already had a Stibo Systems master data solution in place to manage product information. The solution was well integrated into Balluff's overall IT architecture and connected seamlessly with other systems like SAP, making it a convenient choice for enhancing product-related content management.

This was a cost-efficient option compared to implementing an entirely new system.

The MDM provides a structured platform for storing and managing all product-related information. The solution allows for flexible document creation and supports multiple document types, including Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), technical support instructions, update instructions, application notes and more.

Balluff could, therefore, use their existing MDM as the company's knowledge database to make consistent and reliable data accessible across different departments and systems.

AI-enabled translations. Balluff also introduced AI-based translation coupled with a structured review process facilitated by the MDM solution. New content is created in English and then translated. A workflow within the MDM ensures a controlled and efficient review of translated content before it is made available externally.

Results

Centralized data governance. By making the MDM a central information hub, Balluff has achieved a solution that provides consistent data across all communication channels.

With a centralized data governance, new tools could be developed for the sales team and customers, such as a website tool for selecting and configuring the right RFID system. These tools, powered by the MDM, help to make the complex product portfolio accessible and aid in product selection.

Real-time data publishing. Balluff is now publishing data to the website every five minutes. This real-time data update capability ensures that customers and internal teams always have access to the latest and most accurate information.

Changes in data sheets can now be processed within minutes due to great flexibility and efficiency in managing product information.

SaaS. With the new solution, the MDM was successfully migrated to a Software as a Service (SaaS) environment, reaping benefits, such as having a single provider, a unified service level agreement and improved IT security.

AI. The integration of AI-based translation tools has made translations faster, more cost-efficient and well-accepted compared to traditional translation agencies. The use of AI-based translation and the integration with the MDM provides efficiency and control over the translation process. Changes are implemented within minutes, offering greater flexibility and responsiveness compared to the previous process.

> " We chose Stibo Systems MDM because of the configurability of the solution, allowing us to adapt the standard solution to meet our specific business needs. This flexibility is essential in solving the challenges related to our complex portfolio."
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> — Florian Kroener, Head of Portfolio Management Web

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