Elders' web portal - digital transformation success with LANSA

Snapshot

Customer: Elders is a leading agribusiness and an iconic brand in rural and regional Australia, having successfully supported farming businesses since 1839.
https://eldersrural.com.au

Challenge: Provide clients with easy access to information, a large part of which is kept in an ERP system that was not designed for access by customers.

Solution: Build a self-service web portal on the existing ERP platform with fast, real-time access to data. Delivered with Visual LANSA.

Key Benefits: Better customer experience and cost savings. The portal also forms a robust platform on which Elders own IT staff can launch additional services.

Business Need

Elders is a leading agribusiness and an iconic brand throughout Australia. By combining its industry expertise and links to grain, wool and livestock markets, Elders creates specialised products and services to over 40,000 farmers and other primary producers through a network of 400 local branch offices.

As part of its digital strategy, Elders wanted to give its clients easier access to both operational information, as well as to marketing information about its products and services. The main drivers were cost effectiveness and providing a better customer experience.

IT Challenges

Elders' ERP system had grown to consist of a massive 17,000 custom built programs, as it needed to support multiple and very specialized activities, such as acting as a retailer of farm supplies; an agent in wool, grain and livestock; an insurance broker, as well as a real estate agent and provider of financial services.

A key challenge that Elders faced in delivering on its digital transformation initiatives, was to reduce the barriers of access to its ERP. Although reliable, it wasn't designed for customer access.

Elders had used LANSA's low-code platform to modernize some internal applications, but it wasn't till more recently that Elders became familiar with LANSA's responsive web design capabilities.

"After a demo and small proof-of-concept, we realized that with LANSA we could very rapidly develop a self-service web portal on our existing platform with fast, real-time data access. The speed of development, the simplicity and cost savings of reusing our existing technology investment, were very appealing," says David Johnson, Group IT manager at Elders.

The Solution

The web portal was implemented in stages. Stage one provided account summary info and credit limits. It also allowed farmers to authorize staff members for account access and for the various communications with Elders. Development was completed in four weeks, which included two weeks consultancy and mentoring from LANSA Services.

Stage two allowed clients to view their transactions, drill down and download invoices, or download the continuous transaction listing for a selected period. Stage two was developed by two of Elders' developers in just over two months, while also performing their other day-to-day tasks. Their only previous LANSA experience consisted of two weeks mentoring.

"The roll-out went smoothly without any support issues and without a need for training. We just posted a demonstration video. Access works well on the various mobile and desktop platforms that our farmers use. Performance is good as well. With users in the most remote areas, fast network access can be an issue. Application design was kept as lean as possible and that is paying off", said Joe La Vista, Solutions Architect.

Business Impact

Michael Hall, Head of Digital Strategy and Implementation, explained, "The portal is an important part of our digital strategy to provide services that help our clients to increase their productivity. Farmers spend most of their time in the field. The last thing they need is having to do more work in the evening. The LANSA web portal allows them to do as many as possible of their tasks during the day via their mobile. That's a big convenience for them and an important step in improving the Elders client experience."

"Elders is well on its way to achieve new levels of efficiency and business agility," continues Hall. "We will soon be able to replace our expensive monthly mailout of 40,000 printed statements with electronic statements. The portal also provides us with reliable client data, which allows for targeted marketing and better equipped branch offices."

"The LANSA portal provides a robust platform to launch additional services from in the future. Mentoring and collaboration, especially during stage one, helped to ensure an optimal outcome. Our own two developers are now able to quickly add new parts to the portal," said La Vista.

"Our ERP system, while providing the digital backbone of our business, wasn't designed for use by staff in the field and neither for customer access. By extending our ERP system with LANSA to a well-designed mobile web portal we could remove these limitations and transform our system of record to an attractive system of engagement," concludes Johnson.

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Michael Hall, Head of Digital, Elders Rural Services

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Joe La Vista, Solutions Architect, Elders Rural Services

View the video created by Elders to show their customers how to use their new customer web portal. The portal was developed and deployed into production use in less than a month. It was developed entirely with Visual LANSA, with no coding in HTML/JavaScript/CSS.