

Business On Line: A successful new eBusiness tool

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Within twelve months of its launch, Business On Line (BoL) has succeeded in becoming a valued business-to-business tool for ABB SACE and its customers. One of the ABB Group's current online business solutions, it is already supporting more than 50 sales companies worldwide, 25 sales offices in Italy and almost 700 Italian customers, most of whom are wholesalers. In the first year of business some 4500 items worth more than US\$ 3 million were ordered via the site, which is currently accessed an average of 15,000 times a month.

A customer of ABB SACE, Alberto Mauri of Mauri Elettroforniture, has this to say about the new service: "Business On Line is a great help in managing our stock and product mixes, and enables any stock problems to be solved quickly. It is highly flexible and extremely simple, even for those who haven't had any technical training."

Pioneers in the early 1990s – how it all started

ABB SACE's involvement in information technology goes back to 1992 when it released Promorobot®, an early version of what is now known as eBusiness. Promorobot was distributed to wholesalers who had agreed to take part in the project. Ten Promorobots toured Italy

from wholesaler to wholesaler to give customers information about the company's products and services, such as new components and price lists (ABB SACE is active in low-voltage switchgear, among other industry sectors).

Two years later, having realized the growing importance of logistics, the company initiated an experimental

Goodbye to all that!

It is worth reminding ourselves how time-consuming and inefficient stock management could be before the appearance of Business On Line. What procedures were necessary, and what did it take to process an urgent request for material?

1

The customer faxes an urgent request for material to ABB SACE's agent or district office.

2

He then calls to make sure that the request is being processed and that fast delivery is guaranteed.

3

The agent or employee in the district office enters the customer's order into the company's processing system and is given an expected delivery date.

4

The customer calls again to find out if everything is progressing well with his order.



project called Telematic Link. Fifteen customers were provided with a workstation and connected to information systems to enable them to

carry out some of their more important logistic transactions. The customers selected could access the network and view information on the status of stocks.

In 1998-99, a SAP initiative launched two years earlier was extended to, and implemented by, all ABB SACE divisions. At the same time, the development of the Internet encouraged the commencement of work on a business-online system for foreign sales companies and domestic customers.

Pioneers in the early 2000s – Business On Line

Business On Line (<http://bol.it.abb.com>) is an Internet-based service which enables authorized customers to contact ABB SACE and access information 24 hours a day. It is a secure and user-friendly tool that gives customers direct access to a wide variety of functions in real-time. One of these functions, the online ordering system, enables customers to proceed vertically or horizontally through the system to place an order and check its progress in the processing and delivery chain. The following are the basic functions of the order chain in Business On Line:

5

Shipment of the goods to the customer.

6

The customer calls the agent or the district office to get information on shipping procedures.

7

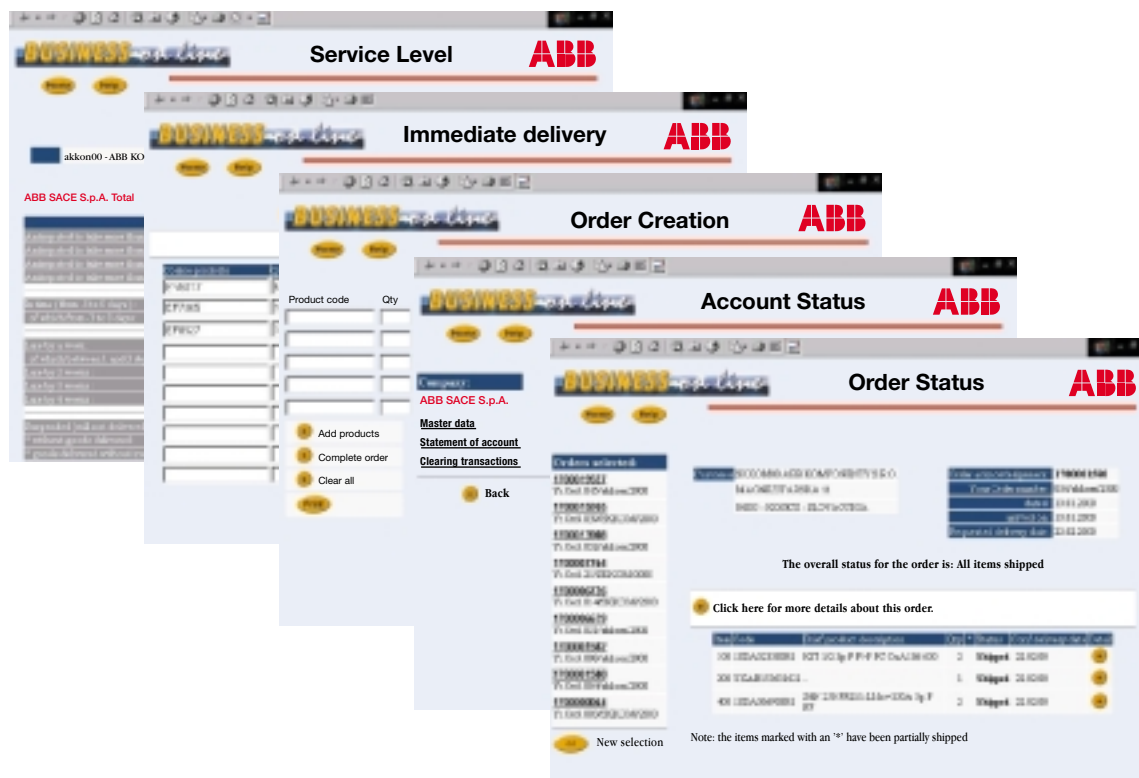
The agent or district office calls the shipping company to obtain the information requested.

8

Anxious to know that everything is running to plan, the customer calls ABB SACE every two hours or so.

9

Eventually, and after many calls, the customer receives the material he ordered.



■ **Client's area:** The entry screen via which customers access the various stages of order placement and processing. It is password-protected.

■ **Stock check:** Customers with a verified password can access stocks to ascertain product availability and determine delivery times.

■ **Order creation:** Customers place their orders here whether the product is in stock or not.

■ **Shipping of documents:** If the products selected are in stock, the customer is presented with online order forms that have to be completed to receive the products by express courier.

■ **Order status:** The current status of an order and all the associated details are checked here.

■ **Account status:** This function enables customers to check the real-time status of their accounts. It saves them time and money as they no longer have to call the company to obtain this information.

■ **Service level:** Here the customer can find out the truth about the company's ability to deliver on time. Although it might be thought imprudent for a company to divulge how many of its deliveries are made on time, it is believed that this is the best way to help customers improve their stock management. When the number of on-time deliveries is high, customers should, in theory, be prepared to make smaller orders; when on-time deliveries are falling, it may be advisable for them to place larger orders.

■ **Wholesalers' contract:** This section is reserved for wholesalers. They can enter it at any time to check the number of purchases they still need to make to achieve sales targets and earn target-related bonuses. In the past, when wholesalers realized they were behind on their targets, they would rapidly embark on aggressive sales drives to raise their figures. BoL makes such

spurious campaigns unnecessary by allowing wholesalers to keep a close check on their sales volumes, which in turn leads to better control of procurement policies. This has advantages for the wholesaler, the end-user and ABB.

New portal launched

In July last year, a new portal was launched which makes BoL available to all the main companies in the electro-mechanical equipment industry, from installers to end-users. The portal allows customers and field operators to carry out their business much more quickly and efficiently than was previously possible. It provides an effective medium for services such as technology updates and application-specific solutions.

The portal's product selection function provides an excellent set of tools to enable the fault-free calculation and dimensioning of installations and components. Manuals can be consulted

to ensure that the correct device and accessories are selected. The portal includes the following tools and services:

- Online selector and product documentation
- Training
- Working tools and software
- Expert advice and FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions)

Online selector and product documentation

The online selector connects visitors to the product families. It guides the user along pre-defined paths to enable components and devices to be matched optimally with the electrical installation in question.

For those devices that may be combined with accessories, the visitor is given the configuration of the product and advised on all aspects of the installation. Catalogs and technical manuals can be downloaded in pdf format.

Training

Training and education are seen by the company as a means of providing quality service to professionals operating in the same field. Several courses are aimed at providing in-depth information on our products and the applications in which they are used. Customers can consult the program and session calendar on the portal and book directly online. BoL is a rapid and efficient tool for handling the administration of training courses and for providing services such as matriculation and booking confirmation.

Working tools and software

Some of the most useful working tools for field operators are now available online. Operators can, for example, select the most suitable protection devices for a motor, choose the best combination of automatic circuit-breakers for backup protection, and draw up estimates for low-voltage molded-case and air circuit-breakers.

Software that enables users to select components with less risk of error and comply with industry standards is also included in this section of the portal.

Retrofitting is an important part of ABB SACE's service department. BoL provides visitors with up-to-the-minute information on, say, which new version of a molded-case or air circuit-breaker is the best alternative to earlier versions. Order codes, delivery times and instructions on how to install the retrofit can be accessed from the site.

Expert advice and FAQs

A large amount of interactive information is available on BoL to enable customers to investigate technical and application issues in greater detail. Field operators can obtain answers to the questions they face in their daily work, and proposals for solutions to specific problems. All the information is continually updated and expanded, and includes contributions from field experts and operators.

A source of value

The widespread daily use of BoL confirms its usefulness and value to customers. Easy to use and rich in



information, it has helped the company to improve its already excellent relationships with customers.

Business On Line will be continually updated and expanded, and adapted to changing market needs. It will accommodate the requirements of professionals for top-quality products while enabling ABB SACE to be a 'partner supplier' capable of providing the customer, quickly and effectively, with solutions to his daily problems.

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