

Adlib & Lyondellbasell: A Blueprint for ECM Success

Challenge

LyondellBasell needed a solution for converting AutoCAD and MicroStation files into readable documents accessible to their global team.

Solution

LyondellBasell implemented a new document conversion system using Adlib for PDF rendering of their engineering drawings.

Results

- Converted PDF documents are accessible enterprise-wide on any device
- Scanned documents and PDFs are fully searchable based on content
- Real-time monitoring capabilities of the document queue allow administrators to prevent backlogs
- Excellent user experience and prolonged uptime

Overview

LyondellBasell is a multinational chemical company with teams located around the world requiring access to engineering drawings. The company stores these documents in Documentum, and was previously formatting documents for upload using a console-based application which was lacking in monitoring functions and technical support, and which converted documents into an image format that was not text searchable. The company found themselves searching for a better document conversion solution.

Challenge

Assisting users with unstable software isn't fun for anyone. I've learned this over the past sixteen years at LyondellBasell's, the last eight working in application support.

Application support is crucial to keeping any business on track. My job is to keep the applications used daily by our global team running smoothly. In my role, there is nothing more frustrating than having to jump through hoops to get an answer about an IT issue. But there are times when the cause of problems or limitations are associated with the software itself. So as you can imagine, I am someone who looks for a good product with equally good support.

Managing CAD Documents for a Worldwide Enterprise

Our company manufactures industrial fuels, plastics, and other chemicals. We constantly build, maintain, and upgrade our manufacturing and refining facilities. As a result, our engineers are always designing new schematics and blueprints. About 90% of these are created in AutoCAD, with the rest originating in MicroStation.

We use Documentum to manage and archive these documents. We also make them available to our engineering teams and

other stakeholders around the world. For example, an engineer in Houston can add a schematic for a component to our Documentum farm and share it with a colleague in Frankfurt. The German co-worker can then annotate the file and save it alongside the older version. Documentum handles permissions and automates versioning.

However, we can't simply save AutoCAD and MicroStation files to Documentum. Instead, we have to convert them into a useable format.

There are two reasons for this, and both make economic sense. The first is size. AutoCAD and MicroStation files can contain dozens of layers and thousands of elements. All this information adds up and files can balloon from two or three to hundreds of megabytes. Factor in the number of designs our engineers produce every year, and storage becomes an issue.

The second is compatibility. AutoCAD and MicroStation are specialized applications used by our engineers. They are very expensive and have a steep learning curve. It is wasteful to provide such software and training to managers and others who only need to consult rather than create such files.

An Outdated Console-Based Rendering Solution

In the past, we used a console-based application to convert and publish such files to Documentum. It was made by a small developer who stopped updating and supporting it. When it came to technical issues, we were on our own—and there were a lot of issues.

Our previous conversion solution had no reporting or monitoring services. When something went wrong, we had to manually restart the application or reboot the server. We had no way of tracking errors or reviewing backlogs in the conversion queue. If someone called up and asked why their documents had not been converted, we couldn't explain why. We had no way of knowing whether somebody had dumped too many documents into the server at once. It was bad enough for end users, but tech support was a nightmare.

Adlib is easy to install and configure. Anyone with a basic understanding of programming can quickly learn to extend the built-in scripts and connectors.

There was one other disadvantage with our previous system: It converted AutoCAD and MicroStation documents into TIFF, which is an image format. There was no way for users to search the text within these files once we archived them in Documentum. It was clear we needed a better solution.

Choosing a New Document Conversion Platform

In 2016, we started to look for a new enterprise-grade document conversion platform. Our custom solutions lead looked at all the products on the market and narrowed the choice to three vendors. I joined the product selection team, and each of us was given a platform to evaluate. We weren't reading product literature and listening to sales pitches—we tested each of these platforms to see how well they ran on our servers.

We asked questions like, were they easy to install and support? Did they integrate well with Documentum? How well did they render documents? The solution I was assigned was easy enough to install, but I needed a developer to code a document association for me. It lacked integration.

At the end of these trials, each of us wrote up the application we tested. We combined our notes and compared all three in a spreadsheet. They were all equal in rendering capacity, but one stood out in terms of integration, ease of installation, and support: Adlib Software.

Adlib is easy to install and configure. It runs as a Windows service and integrates seamlessly with Documentum. Adlib is also easy to customize, and its powerful scripting engine is very well documented. Anyone with a basic understanding of programming can quickly learn to extend the built-in scripts and connectors. Installation and configuration are straightforward. You do everything on one page using a visual interface: You can drag and drop a connector, configure the way it integrates with your database, and you're done.

Once you've set up one server, you can export the configuration file and use it to set up another. With our previous system, we had to manually add every new server. Automating the process not only saves time, but prevents the introduction of human error. Although we had detailed documents that outlined the process, people sometimes made mistakes. A tiny error in the configuration file could cause major headaches in the future.

The Practical Advantages of Accelerated Learning

There's also the matter of training. It took at least two days to teach members of our support team how to configure and troubleshoot the previous rendering package. Even then, they would still have questions because it wasn't flexible or intuitive.

Learning Adlib takes only a couple of hours. It is so straightforward that we were able to write a guide for our offshore teams without hiring an external consultant.

A few months ago, one of my team members was reassigned. Before he left, he trained me to take over his configuration duties. I was a little nervous, but he reassured me that the process was very simple. He taught me everything I needed to know in a single sitting.

Two months later, a user from our Chicago plant asked me to change the configuration of his rendering queue. He no longer wanted to render the drawings of a type of joint contained in his unit's business folder.

It took me less than five minutes to update his configuration by adding an exception for that specific object ID. When I call Adlib, their help desk deals with my tickets right away. This level of support has a cascade effect and translates into better service for my own users.

A Complete Enterprise-grade PDF Conversion Solution

Adlib provides the best document conversion experience to our users. Stability and ease-of-use are definite plusses. However, the biggest improvement Adlib has brought to our workflow is the creation of PDF conversions.

PDF is a universal file format. Anyone in our organization can view and share such a document. More importantly, they can search its text. Our previous system could only convert AutoCAD and MicroStation files in TIFF format. In the past, our engineers had to generate a separate PDFs within these two applications, and then upload it to Documentum.

Adlib has removed this extra step. This not only frees our engineers to focus on their work, but also shifts the processor-intensive conversion job from their workstations to our Documentum servers. It also standardizes the PDF-creation process. There are no surprises caused by the way different apps convert documents.

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A Blueprint for Success

Ultimately, Adlib makes the document conversion process easy and transparent for end users and for our support team. This facilitates the free flow of documents and information across our entire organization.

One of our next steps is creating customized Adlib configuration for each of our plants. Our various facilities have different specifications for AutoCAD and MicroStation drawings. Some want color, others want black and white.

They are all working with various contractors around the world who have their own file specifications. Adlib empowers our engineers to focus on innovation instead of worrying about their documents converting. Being proactive and stopping problems before they start have become second nature to my support team. End users can now search the text of CAD files without having to purchase or master expensive and complicated software.

Adlib is helping us save time, money, and effort. This is a blueprint for success.



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