

Windward is the solution that allowed me to come in and hit our budget right on the money.

—Arland Head, Director of IT

Grocery Chain Produces Results with Windward Studios

Solving Document Woes

Paperwork is the lifeblood of many medium-sized businesses. It can also be a burden, causing the waste of valuable employee time and resources.

For one grocery chain in Louisiana, dealing with a massive amount of paperwork was a huge challenge. The retailer implemented Windward's document generation solution and in one month slashed the hiring cycle from days to hours, eliminated couriers bearing time-sensitive documentation, and saved hundreds of hours of employee time per year formerly spent on hiring documentation.

The Company

LeBlanc's Food Stores is a family-owned, full-service group of grocery stores headquartered in Gonzales, Louisiana. Founded in 1961, it has eight regional locations in a roughly 40-mile radius. LeBlanc's prides itself on customer service, quality products, excellent selection, and competitive prices.

The Challenge

LeBlanc's hiring process was inefficient and costly. Potential employees would apply for employment at stores external to the central office, stores would send the documents via vehicle courier to LeBlanc's headquarters, and the modified paperwork would be returned to the stores in the same manner.

This caused several difficulties. Time-sensitive hiring documents were transmitted via scheduled courier runs, a process that necessitated a lengthy delay of several days or even a week between when a prospective employee submitted an application and when the employee was officially hired. This process opened LeBlanc's to a potential risk of employees working before their official hiring paperwork was completed.



EMPLOYMENT APPLICATION

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Date: 01/06/2012

Last Name:

First Name:

Middle:

Home Street Address:

City:

State:

Zip Code:

Home Phone:

Cell Phone:

Email Address:

If you're under 18 years of age, please state your date of birth: (dd/mm/yyyy)

Are you interested in: Full-Time Part-Time
(check all that apply)

In addition – and perhaps most importantly – this system left significant room for error. Employees manually input information into company-wide databases, and LeBlanc’s faced the risk of inaccurate, missing, or otherwise incomplete data.

The Evaluation

Director of IT Arland Head searched for automated “mail merge” tools on the Internet. He identified several possible solutions but quickly found two key drawbacks. One, they did not allow for bar code attachment, so managers must manually attach identification for each employee to each hiring form. Two, the software applications were prohibitively expensive, costing roughly \$20,000 or \$30,000 to implement.

“When I began looking, I thought ‘Seriously, these other companies want me to pay how much?’” Head said. “Windward cost half of what else was out there.”

Along with the affordable price point, Windward Studios allowed Head to download a fully functional trial and build a proof of concept. Head presented that proof of concept to his bosses to show exactly how the new system would work and what it would encompass, including attaching unique, automated bar codes for the documentation. They gave him the go-ahead to purchase AutoTag and the Windward Engine.

“It was really important that I could use the software before I bought it; I needed to prove that it could do exactly what I wanted it to do,” Head said. “We tweaked the solution to make sure the screens would do everything they needed to, and there were no additional costs as a result of our modifications.”

The Solution

Head wrote web-based software to work with Windward’s document generation solution. The AutoTag system can tag all fields and format them

About LeBlanc’s Food Stores

LeBlanc’s Food Stores, with headquarters in Gonzales, Louisiana, operates eight full-service supermarkets and is owned and operated by brothers Marcy and Randy LeBlanc. LeBlanc’s Food Stores is a member of Associated Grocers, Inc., the area’s largest distributor of wholesale and retail grocers.

to generate as a bar code, and the end user then logs in and fills in various bits of information. The Windward Engine takes this information and prints a PDF over a Virtual Private Network to the local store, and Head prints that information to a central directory.

On the store end, the hiring manager pulls the printed documents, has the employee fill out any missing information, and then scans the documents back into the system via the VPN. Each file is sent to the Payroll, Time Clock, and Imaging software indexes. The solution links fields internally and authorized users can see all linked documents.

Another key piece is that the solution aggregates information into an XML file instead of sending it directly to a company database. This file helps keep a disconnect from the proprietary databases and adds a level of security. Head gathers data points from multiple databases and puts these data points into one file the Windward Engine can access.

The Windward Engine is installed on a dedicated 2008 R2 application server connected via a secure Intranet with encrypted tunnels. LeBlanc’s does not need to install servers in each store, and the one Windward license applies to all remote locations, helping to keep costs low.

Not all of the new solution is due solely to Windward; for example, Head also implemented a corporation-wide time clock system. But the Windward software is a vital component.

“Windward is the core piece that makes this happen,” Head said. “I’m a non-programmer, and I was able to write this application. Windward is the solution that allowed me to come in and hit our budget right on the money.”

The Achievements

The Windward solution is being used to make the hiring process more efficient for approximately 27,000 hiring documents per year. In this area alone, LeBlanc’s has seen the following:

- **Significant human resource cost savings.** Time spent on employee hiring documentation dropped to approximately 1/4th the previous amount – from between one to two days per employee to two to three hours per employee. That averages out to a time savings of approximately 1,200 hours yearly. Plus, the supervisor’s role moved from one of data entry to primarily compliance, a better use of her skills and expertise.
- **Measurable management time savings.** Because much of the hiring form information is pre-filled, managers at the store level simply have to verify it is correct. Head estimates this saves an average of 10-20 minutes per employee, or roughly 200 hours per year. And since there’s less keying in from paper, the system reduces the risk of data errors.
- **Better control over the hiring process.** The ability to attach document bar codes contributed to a more efficient system. Rehires can be identified immediately so the company does not duplicate paperwork. Hiring documents are automatically time-stamped

About Windward

For businesses in document-intensive industries, Windward Studios is the document generation and reporting software company that empowers business professionals to create beautiful, professional reports. Create custom reports with Microsoft Office as your design tool and a Java or .NET engine that connects to virtually any data source. Windward has been delighting customers since 2004.

and entered into the archives, and emails are generated to human resources. Formerly disjointed processes are tied together.

- **Shorter hiring cycle.** The hiring completion process dropped from two to three days to just one day. In addition, the risk of a new hire beginning work without proper verification was almost completely eliminated, helping LeBlanc’s comply with necessary regulations.

Future Plans

Currently LeBlanc’s is using the Windward document generation solution solely as a tool for hiring, but Head expects to utilize it in other areas, including payroll changes and employee notification letters.

“This has opened up a number of doors for us,” Head said. “I’ve gotten some significant ‘wows’ from my colleagues, and I’m excited to expand this project. The foundation is solidly in place.”

Add Reporting and Document Generation to Your Software Application

[Download a free, 14-day trial of Windward’s products](#) or [request a live demonstration](#).