Bandai Co., Ltd.

Customer Service Center uses JP1 to Support Remote Voucher Processing and Night Batch Processing

Bandai has ushered in countless hit products such as "Tamagotchi," and now it is making the leap from toy manufacturer to general entertainment corporation.   The energy that gives rise annually to about 3000 new products from all businesses combined—including over 1500 new toy products alone—is the source of the company's growth.   On the other hand, since all its products are for the general public, Bandai must be able to respond quickly and accurately to inquiries and complaints from customers who purchase them.   And supporting operation of the information system at Bandai's Customer Service Center, Bandai's point of contact with consumers, is Hitachi's JP1 integrated system operation management software.   What does Bandai think of it?   We found out by talking with employees at the Service Center.

USER PROFILE (at end of March 1997)

Company name:	Bandai Co., Ltd.
Headquarters:	2-5-4 Komagata, Taito-ku, Tokyo
Established:	July 5, 1950
Capital:	¥21,796,000,000
Number of Employees:	944

Customer Service Center Handles Over 550,000 Inquiries Annually

Bandai's Customer Service Center in Kashiwa, Chiba, has an array of 18 PCs staffed by female operators wearing headsets. They respond to a continuous stream of incoming calls while referring to the information on their computer screens.   The toy products manufactured by the company are all lined up on the shelves along the walls.   This allows the operators to check the products at any time, depending on the nature of the inquiry.

The Customer Service Center is responsible for the following: "complaint processing" for logging complaints about missing parts and product defects; "repair processing" for fixing products that have broken down during use; "telephone order processing" for the purchase of parts and products; and "inquiry processing" for answering product-related questions.   In a way, the Center is the main link between the customers and Bandai. The Customer Service Center in Kashiwa was the first, followed by similar centers in Tokyo, Shizuoka, Nagoya, and Osaka, linked by a network to handle inquiries from all over Japan.

Bandai first opened its Customer Service Center in 1981. The company then built a customized system for the Center in April 1996 to handle inquiries, which have increased steadily each year.   Operation was started with the main purpose of "paying serious attention to the voices of our customers and responding to inquiries and complaints in a quick, accurate, and courteous manner."

Remote Voucher Processing and Night Batch Processing with JP1

The Service Center System is designed as a typical client/server system in which a PC server installed at the Kashiwa Center is linked with PC servers found at the other service centers throughout Japan. A total of about 50 client PCs are connected to those PC servers.   The servers use the Windows NT 3.51 operating system, while the clients use Windows 95.   An Oracle database was constructed for the back end.

Operation processing work is as follows.   First, pertinent date from each inquiry received by service centers throughout the country are input into a customized standard processing form on the PC screen, then transferred to the server at Kashiwa in the standardized format.   If the inquiry requires shipment—replacement of a product or part, repair, or telephone order—the form that was input becomes the shipping order.

The point here is that the PCs at the various service centers are used strictly for data input and transfer only.   All processes that accompany the instructions on the form are implemented as remote jobs at a single location.   The tool that supports processing of those remote jobs is JP1.

Satoshi Chikada, Assistant Director of the Information Systems Office, Administration Division (which was in charge of developing the system) says, "We addressed the Service Center System to respond quickly to customer inquiries and to provide shipment instructions and deliveries speedily through remote processing. To achieve this, we decided to use JP1, which is well suited to remote jobs."

Takeshi Kimura from the same Information Systems Office is also pleased with JP1, "We used JP1/Network Batch to process forms remotely.   By doing so, we can ship an order on the same day it is received, provided we have the product in stock."

The service center system makes effective use of JP1 not only for remote jobs, but for processing other information as well.

Kimura explains: "To make the customer's voice heard by quality control, and in turn by product development, we must organize and tabulate complaint and repair data, then feed the information back to the relevant departments. That being said, we can't use the servers during the day for this because they are being used for customer support. We therefore decided to use the JP1/Automatic Job Scheduler.

"With this software, all we do is specify the times, and the software performs automatically all the calculations, and on the next day we can get the tabulated data from the previous day.   On top of that, the data is backed up automatically."

On this point, Kaoru Ochiai, Manager of the Quality Assurance Section, Development Division, and the person in charge of operations at the Customer Service Center, also holds the system in high esteem: "Ever since this system for tabulating inquiry information was installed, the feedback time to the Quality Assurance Department has shortened dramatically.   Consequently, if there were a number of complaints about one particular item from the previous day, we can work on corrective measures immediately."

Going Forward: Remote System Management Based on the JP1 Operation Management Environment

As we have seen so far, Bandai's Service Center System uses JP1 effectively to handle high job volume through batch processing at a remote location, and automatic overnight batch processing. We asked Bandai representatives on their plans for future system growth, including other uses for JP1.

Manager Ito points out: "When we look at the system from the standpoint of business operation, there are three things that we want to do in the future.   First is feeding effective information back to planning and product development.   Second is early response to complaints and immediate information feedback to manufacturing about those complaints.   Third is expanding the system know-how accumulated by the Service Center to the group companies."

Manager Ochiai adds "At this point, the call center process is up and running.   We have been able to demonstrate considerable success in terms of responding promptly to customer inquiries.   Furthermore, we were lucky enough to have a number of hit products over the last year; as a result, the number of inquiries rose sharply, but the system performed admirably for us."

"However, as the inquiries become more and more complex, we have had cases that the Service Center couldn't handle on its own.   In the future, we would like to incorporate the inquiry contents into a database that can be retrieved at any time from any location."

Assistant Director Chikada, who is responsible for listening to the user-side requests and for handling the actual expansion of the system, is enthusiastic about future prospects. "Initially, we started small and gradually built the system up until we reached the point we're at now.   For the future, we are thinking of linking this system with the core system. If we can, for example, add a financial component to the input/output process in telephone sales and repairs, we can probably expand the scope of applications even wider."

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