

Online Pharmacy Catalogue helps NHS deliver substantial cost savings



Online Pharmacy Catalogue

Project at a glance

The Pharmaceutical division of the NHS PASA wanted to put their monthly CD catalogue of pharmaceutical products on-line.

PDMS developed a comprehensive on-line catalogue holding information on suppliers, contracts and over 20,000 products using FoundationsTM

With information on pending price increases and decreases, NHS pharmacy staff can now make better informed purchasing decisions

The new on-line catalogue has resulted in direct cost savings and helps NHS pharmacy staff achieve value for money

"We are delighted with the successful outcome of the on-line pharmacy catalogue project. Feedback from the many users within the NHS trusts has been positive and the new catalogue will undoubtedly help them achieve value for money. PDMS are to be commended for delivering a solution that meets our business requirements both within budget and to tight deadlines"
Joe Walsh Head of eProcurement



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The Challenge

The NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency (NHS PASA), an Arms Length Body of the Department of Health, plays an active role in the ongoing modernisation of purchasing and supply in the health service. NHS hospitals in England currently spend around £2.2 billion annually on pharmaceuticals. It is estimated that around £1.7 billion of the total is spent on branded pharmaceuticals - the remainder covers generic drugs and pharmaceutical related products such as gases, blood products, renal and enteral feeds. The pharmaceutical section of NHS PASA helps the NHS deliver best value, not only by negotiating framework agreements, but also providing information and support to the many NHS trusts and confederations.

PDMS work with NHS PASA on several different projects, one of which was to supply information on pharmaceutical framework agreements to pharmacy staff working in hospital trusts on CD-Rom. The CDs were produced on a monthly basis and contained a wide range of information on pharmaceutical products e.g. medicines, medical consumables etc. including framework agreements in place, supplier details, supplier terms including prices etc. In order to reduce production and distribution costs and to enable data to be updated much more quickly, NHS PASA decided to replace the CD and put the pharmacy catalogue on-line via a website. PDMS were selected to develop the new on-line catalogue which had to be up and running within a tight 4 month deadline.

The Solution

The new online catalogue has similar functionality to that of the old CD but also has several new useful features. Accessible via the internet, pharmacy staff within the NHS can log on to the site and see product, supplier and contract information for the different framework agreements negotiated for their specific trust or region. The information contained on the framework agreements is comprehensive and includes: the product including brand names, pack sizes, codes; suppliers including their terms and prices and contact details; specific information including start and end dates. Importantly, the on-line catalogue also shows any pending price increases or decreases for products and changes to terms so that hospital staff can make an informed decision as to the best time to purchase in order to achieve value for money. Unlike the CD which only contained information on the current month, the new on-line catalogue also stores a 12 month history of price data for each product. This feature enables users to quickly and easily view all price changes since the last catalogue update.

Because the catalogue holds data on tens of thousands of products it was imperative that searching for information within the product database was made as quick and as easy as possible. Pharmacy staff can search on multiple criteria including all changes since the previous catalogue or filter the search to more specific changes including deleted products, price increases, price reductions, revised supplier terms etc. Data can also be exported to Excel spreadsheets for further analysis and distribution.

Staff at NHS PASA also have an administration facility so they can control access to the system and issue passwords etc. The system has been designed to ensure that users only view details of products and suppliers that are relevant to their particular NHS trust or group of trusts. System administrators at NHS PASA can also add relevant news about products and suppliers to the contract news pages and again, users of the catalogue will only be able to see news applicable to their local area.

PDMS developed the on-line catalogue using their FoundationsTM application development server and business components which already covered much of the functionality including the product catalogue and user authentication. Developed in Microsoft. Net and C#, the system also uses a SQL Server database. The data for the catalogue comes from the NHS' Phate System and PDMS have developed import routines to extract, upload and import the data into the new on-line catalogue. This import routine is scheduled to run overnight so as not to interrupt access

to the system during the day. The data is first imported into a verification website so that it can be checked before being put on to the live website used by the pharmacists.

By using FoundationsTM, PDMS were able to complete the specification and development phases of the project and deliver the on-line catalogue for user acceptance testing to the Pharmacy Business Technology group within a 4 month timeframe. The on-line catalogue went live in May 2006 and the monthly CDs have now been phased out.

Results

With the introduction of the new on-line pharmacy catalogue, NHS PASA are not only making considerable cost savings but are also helping pharmacy staff in hospital trusts to achieve value for money. The CDs cost money to produce and distribute within the NHS each month and this expense has now been eliminated. Moreover, with the on-line catalogue, staff at NHS PASA have direct control over how frequently the information in the catalogue is updated and the process is a lot quicker and easier to manage.

Pharmacy staff now have immediate access to a history of price movements for each product over 12 months and importantly, pending product price increases or decreases. This information allows them to decide which products to purchase and when to order them in order to achieve the greatest cost savings.

The new on-line pharmacy catalogue currently stores information on over 20,000 pharmaceutical products and has been well received by the users within the many NHS hospital trusts who use it on a regular basis.