



## Manufacturer Boosts Customer Service with Current, Discoverable Web Information

### Overview

**Country or Region:** United States

**Industry:** Manufacturing

### Customer Profile

PolyOne, based in Avon Lake, Ohio, manufactures vinyl, polymer, and related products. The company has 4,600 employees and annual revenues of U.S.\$2.7 billion.

### Business Situation

The company wanted to provide its customers with more accurate, more current, and more easily discoverable information than it could provide through its existing Web site.

### Solution

PolyOne based its Web site on Microsoft® Office SharePoint® Server 2007.

### Benefits

- Updates posted in 20 seconds
- Search relevancy is up to 98 percent
- Collaboration expedites document creation and posting
- International profile is raised and reach is deepened

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It was taking days, sometimes weeks, for IT staff to post new product information and even minor updates to the Web site of PolyOne Corporation, a leading global manufacturer of polymer compounds and additives. Once posted, that information could be difficult to find. To better serve its customers with up-to-date, easy-to-find information, PolyOne considered RedDot and Google solutions, then chose Microsoft® Office SharePoint® Server 2007. Now, content owners can update their own areas of the site in as little as 20 seconds, ensuring that information is fresh and freeing IT staff to work on higher-value tasks. Locating information on the new site is easier for customers, with search accuracy at 98 percent, and the SharePoint site enhances internal collaboration. PolyOne also is using the multilingual capability of Office SharePoint Server 2007 to improve its international profile.



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## Situation

PolyOne is large, just about any way you measure it. The company—which makes engineering-grade polymer compounds, colorant, and additives—serves more than 10,000 customers in 35 countries. Its eight business groups produce thousands of products and more than 300 trade names across 10 markets.

The company hosted a business-to-business Web site to make information on all of these products—and its contact names and phone numbers—available to customers worldwide. But there were problems.

Since the company’s Web site was based on home-grown code originating nearly 10 years earlier, making changes to the site—from adding new product information to correcting phone listings—required the use of an interface that was too complicated for its business users to do for themselves. So, the task of updating the site fell to the IT department.

“Because the users weren’t able to make changes on their own, it made it difficult for employees to stay engaged,” Says Ray Kling, Commercial Manager of Global Business Systems, PolyOne. With just two people available to make those changes, business units commonly waited days or weeks for changes to be implemented. That affected the company’s ability to serve its customers, because those customers couldn’t always find current information on the Web site. And, in the highly competitive market in which PolyOne operates, the ability to provide customer service has a direct effect on market share.

Reliance on the IT department to make changes also affected the productivity of that department, as staff members occupied with Web site updates lacked the time to focus on more strategic functions. “Our IT staff was

spending a significant amount of its time providing low-value work uploading content to the site,” says John Nose, Corporate Webmaster, PolyOne. “It wasn’t how we wanted to spend those high-value resources.”

Even when current information was available on the site, the company’s customers couldn’t always find it. The site’s search technology was slow and often delivered irrelevant or redundant results.

“We offer nearly every polymer type in the world,” says David Honeycutt, Director of Marketing and eBusiness, PolyOne. “Enabling customers to find what they are looking for quickly and easily through a keyword search or logical navigation is essential; however, our site was simply not performing—in part because we were using outdated technology, in part because of our ongoing struggle with content currency, and in part because we had outgrown the navigation and search systems we’d set up years before.”

Adds Kling, “One of the major shortcomings of our previous implementation was that the search and navigation capabilities were horrific. We didn’t even have functioning keyword search.”

PolyOne also saw room for improvement in the way company executives collaborated to produce and publish news releases on the Web site. The process followed a traditional, manual route, with executives clogging the e-mail system with multiple versions of news release drafts and creating version-control challenges. Because news releases had to be posted to the site manually, it could take up to a day to get completed releases onto the site—an unacceptable delay in an era of 24-hours-a-day/seven-days-a-week news cycles.

“When we wanted to publish a press release in the middle of the night, for example, on the old site, we had to have our IT staff available

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Greg Deckler, Solution Architect, Blue Chip Consulting Group

on standby at 2:00 a.m.,” says Nose. “We weren’t able to configure publication to happen automatically.”

Serving the international market was yet another concern for PolyOne. The company hosted a version of its site for the Chinese market, but the site was hosted in the English language because the company didn’t have IT staff available to host a separate, Chinese-language site, nor did it want to turn over control of the site to a third-party provider.

Further, any time a change was made to the U.S. Web site, the company’s IT department would have to manually update the international sites as well, which was time consuming. “The information quickly ran amok,” says Greg Deckler, Solution Architect at Blue Chip Consulting Group, the Microsoft® Gold Certified Partner that helped PolyOne with its new solution.

Data across the various sites was often inconsistent. “Because the sites didn’t tie well, they didn’t represent the company as a single global enterprise,” says Kling.

Adds Deckler, “The problem we needed to solve was to try and put on a more global face, rather than a regional face. The content on the PolyOne site was out of date. Customers were getting wrong information. This was having a tremendous impact on PolyOne’s business overhead. Customers were calling the wrong office, and the organization was losing customers. There was a huge perception problem with customers who felt that PolyOne wasn’t with the times due to the out-of-date look and feel of the Web site.”

The Chinese-language site drew just 5 percent of total traffic to PolyOne, although the Chinese market represented 10 percent of the company’s business—and the Chinese and Asian markets were growing at twice the

rate of the United States and European markets. “We knew the site wasn’t serving the Chinese market as well as it should,” says Honeycutt. “We wanted to localize content in Simplified Chinese, and eventually, in other languages as well.”

As a result of these business challenges, PolyOne determined that it needed to shift its technology infrastructure to a newer, more optimal platform.

### Solution

In August 2006, the company decided to revamp its Web site as part of a renewed strategic focus on improving customer service. As part of this decision, PolyOne determined that it needed both new content management technology and new search technology.

#### Selecting the Right Technology

PolyOne turned to Blue Chip Consulting Group to help identify the new technologies for its Web site. Together, the companies considered at least five content management solutions and four enterprise search solutions, including one Microsoft solution in each category. Each of the potential solutions was evaluated on a range of criteria, including core and extended requirements, administrative and development capabilities, support for business goals, and long-term support.

For content management, PolyOne chose Microsoft Office SharePoint® Server 2007 over primary competitor RedDot, mainly because of the product’s extensibility and ability to provide the capabilities that PolyOne needed out of the box, rather than through expensive customization. RedDot would have required customization that was expensive to implement and to maintain.

For search, the primary choices were Office SharePoint Server 2007 and a Google

Figure 1: PolyOne runs its customer-facing Web site using Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007.

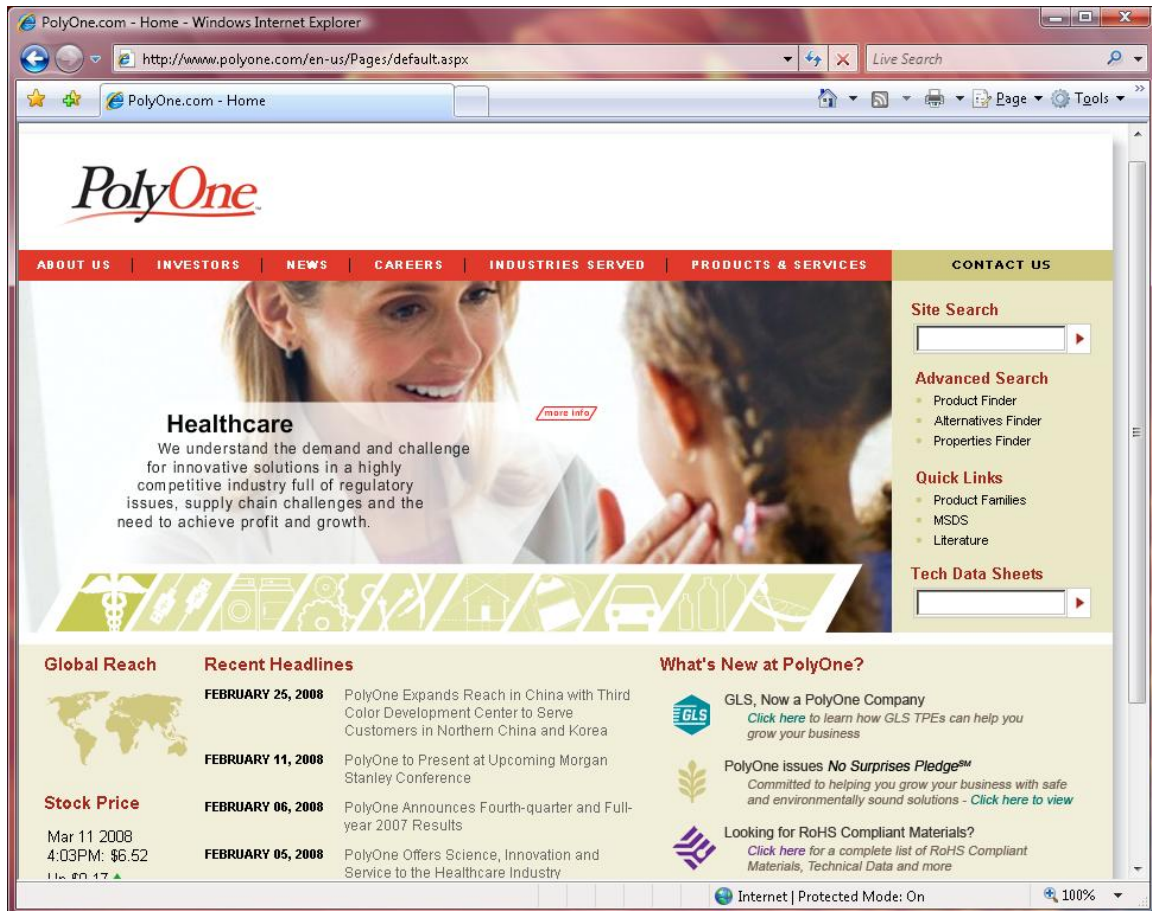
appliance. Again, PolyOne chose Office SharePoint Server 2007. "We saw that SharePoint Server would give us all the capabilities we wanted for search—speed, robustness, accuracy—without the expense and trouble of supporting a separate solution," says Kling. "There was no benefit or reason to go to Google."

### Refining the Web Site

PolyOne employees got their first taste of SharePoint technologies when Blue Chip Consulting created a SharePoint extranet site to manage the Web site migration project. In the process of gathering content and collab-

orating on site requirements and design, PolyOne users became familiar with managing libraries, lists, and other SharePoint site elements. The positive experience with this initial SharePoint site spurred interest in broader deployment of SharePoint products and technologies.

Blue Chip helped PolyOne to conduct focus groups among the company's customers to identify key design requirements of the new site. For example, the old site had been organized along the lines of the company's business groups, but that structure didn't help customers to find products, as product



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content could appear in Web pages or files in virtually any part of the site. As a result, the new site design was organized around the products, with business group information included secondarily.

To produce a comprehensive search result that would dynamically reflect updates to the site, Blue Chip created more than 60 data-driven Web parts that draw from centralized SharePoint lists and libraries and deliver them to pages throughout the Web site.

“The new Web site is a lot easier for PolyOne to manage,” says Deckler. “Employees can put all of the corporate knowledge into lists, and then slice and dice in different ways, instead of copying and pasting information multiple times on multiple pages. This helps PolyOne expose the right contacts in the right contexts.”

Blue Chip and PolyOne took about five weeks to deploy the new SharePoint site, and then spent three months working through a series of iterations to arrive at the site they were ready to launch. “You don’t truly understand how a site works until you see it in action,” says Honeycutt. “We planned for the time it would take to iterate the site, and it was time well spent—it enabled us to create a highly functional site without relying on custom code.

“We used the configuration capability of SharePoint Server wherever possible. More than 90 percent of the site was implemented without custom code, so we are also well-positioned to use the site over the long-term, without having to maintain customized code.”

The solution runs on a pair of server computers, one for the Office SharePoint Server application and one for the Microsoft SQL Server® 2005 database that supports it. Because PolyOne is using a simple architecture on two load-balanced, low-cost blade servers including both a front-end

application and back-end database, the company can easily scale out the solution to support additional Web traffic, should the need arise.

### **Localizing the Web Site**

PolyOne is taking advantage of the multilingual capability of Office SharePoint Server 2007 to create a Simplified Chinese language version of its Web site. The SharePoint technology will tie the two Web sites, so PolyOne can automatically change the appearance of the Chinese site if it makes a change to the English-language site. The multilingual capability also starts a workflow process to update content on the Chinese site when the corresponding content is changed on the English site.

### **Benefits**

PolyOne is now getting current information onto its Web site more quickly; providing customers with better, more easily discovered information; collaborating more successfully; and increasing its international profile.

### **Updates Post in as Little as 20 Seconds**

In contrast to the prior Web site—which required business users to wait days or weeks until the IT department could implement updates—business owners now implement their own updates as quickly as they can conceive of them, thanks to the easier interface of Office SharePoint Server 2007. “With SharePoint Server 2007, users are empowered to own the content in a way that they never have been before,” says Kling.

“It takes 20 seconds to update a phone number or an address and have the change go live,” he says. “That’s astounding. We still have a workflow process to ensure that updates are approved, but IT is no longer the holdup in getting updates out to the site. That

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Because business users are now responsible for implementing updates, IT productivity is up. Kling estimates that, with the new update processes made possible by Office SharePoint Server 2007, PolyOne is saving at least 75 percent of the time of one IT professional.

#### **Search Relevancy Is Up to 98 Percent**

Customers and others are able to find better information faster and more reliably, thanks to the enterprise search enhancements of Office SharePoint Server 2007.

“When you search for a product, the product page comes up as the first result—that didn’t happen before,” says Honeycutt. “Results now are very fast and very accurate. The relevancy of results is up to 98 percent. Customers get more comprehensive and relevant results than ever before. They can perform a keyword search and have results from multiple search scopes returned in a single, easy-to-understand page. In addition, search features and functionality are integrated throughout the site in the form of ‘best bets’ and filtered lists.”

Adds Kling: “In the first two days after we launched the new site, people came up to me amazed at the amount of information we had on it. The truth is that the same information was on the old site as well—it’s just that people couldn’t find it before. Now, they find it immediately.”

Honeycutt adds, “As a result, we expect this new capability will improve customer retention and increase our competitive differentiation and advantage.”

#### **Collaboration Expedites Document Creation, Posting**

Because the SharePoint site is so much more useful than the previous Web site, PolyOne is able to use it in entirely new ways. For example, PolyOne uses the SharePoint site to manage the process of news release development among product, marketing, and legal groups. Drafts of releases are maintained in a SharePoint document library that’s separate from the public document library, and to which only authorized internal users have access. SharePoint workflow speeds the process of review and approval. Once finalized, the releases are scheduled for automatic transfer to the public library. As with the updating of product information, no IT involvement is required for the news release collaboration or publication.

“The process of news release collaboration and posting is faster than before, but even more importantly, we’ve reduced the confusion, the complexity, and the opportunity for error we had with the former process,” says Honeycutt. “Accuracy is up and administrative headaches are down.”

#### **International Profile Is Raised**

The globalization and localization features in Office SharePoint Server 2007 make it straightforward for the international divisions of PolyOne to translate and display Web site content while maintaining corporate brand and identity.

“Having a Simplified Chinese language variant of our Web site will really enable us to increase our reputation with our Asian customers,” says Teddy Xiong, Marketing Manager Asia/Pacific region, PolyOne. “With our Chinese language site, we expect to increase traffic to the site, generate new leads, and facilitate our growth in the region.”

## For More Information

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