



“Sybase’s Enterprise Portal gives Southwire the flexibility to meet customer needs as well as internal needs. We are able to grow over time without changing technology or totally reinvesting in new products.”

— Sheila Simpson,  
Web Development Manager, Southwire

## Southwire

personalized

- Intro:** Southwire, a leading cable and wire manufacturer, had developed My Q-Service™, a popular customer self-service site, which placed them ahead of their competition for online ordering capabilities. Southwire mobilized a team to integrate a good website, eCommerce site, and Intranet into a true eBusiness, supplier-side portal using Sybase Enterprise Portal.
- Business Challenge:** Respond to customer feedback regarding a successful customer self-service site, including eliminating dual-entry orders and providing selective content to different members within a customer’s organization. Add more information and functionality to the site without overloading users, give customers the option of administering their own security on the site, and securely fold Southwire’s corporate Intranet into their website. Enhancements had to be made without disrupting the steady traffic to the customer self-service site.
- Industry:** Cable and Wire Manufacturing
- Business Solution:** Implement a Sybase Enterprise Portal solution delivering a customizable user experience based on defined roles and unique logins. The portal acts as a gateway to the eCommerce site, the Southwire Intranet, various standalone Southwire customer tools, and subscribed content. A workflow tool was built to publish new content to the portal and a search engine was integrated for indexing the content.
- Architecture:** Dell 4450 web servers running Sybase Enterprise Portal executing Java™ and JSP vend user Web pages and tie into the backend Unisys A18 mainframe.
- Products Used:** Sybase Enterprise Portal 2.0, PowerBuilder, and Fast Track to Enterprise Portal training. Sybase Technology Partners Vignette and Autonomy.
- Benefits:**
- Aggregation of information, applications, corporate Intranet, sign-on, and security. Accessed through a common user interface
  - Order dual-entry problem was eliminated by sending orders back to customers using Sybase Enterprise Portal B2B integration tools
  - Multi-level security reflects both Southwire’s organization and customer headquarters and branches
  - Role-based and user level security provide personalized content and application module functionality to individual users
  - Both Southwire and Southwire customers can administer security
- Company Background:** Southwire is the largest cable and wire manufacturing company in North America with 5000 employees and annual sales of 1.7 billion. Located in Carrollton, Georgia, Southwire started producing wire in 1950 after the founder discovered there was not enough power cable available for him to bring electric power to his grandmother living in rural Georgia.

### Leveraging eCommerce into eBusiness with Sybase Enterprise Portal

Southwire, one of the world’s leading cable and wire manufacturers, had a successful PowerBuilder-based customer self-service website, My Q-Service™, used by about 1000 of their customers. As is often the case with success, their active customers wanted several enhancements to the site including eliminating dual entry of their orders and providing wider access to information customized to individual logins. After studying

customer requests and surveying the landscape of potential technology solutions, Southwire chose to implement a corporate portal using Sybase Enterprise Portal. The portal project positions Southwire far ahead of their competitors in order automation and further cements the company’s reputation for quality products, quality service, and technology innovation.

“Leveraging is a big thing here. We are not a Fortune 100 company that can go off and spend \$100 million in eCommerce and do R&D. Our people were client/server PowerBuilder programmers. We have been able leverage that skill set and transition to the portal.”

– Sheila Simpson, Web Development Manager, Southwire

#### **The Portal Project—Improving on Excellence**

Southwire has a tradition of listening to customer requests. After receiving consistent enhancement requests from customers concerning Southwire’s My Q-Service™ website, a Southwire team was assembled from both the technical and business sides of the company. The team wanted to extend Southwire’s thriving Internet solution to address customer needs and make it even more useful for the company’s internal needs. Sheila Simpson the Web Development Manager at Southwire talks about how the project unfolded, “The whole prior year we met with the executives within Southwire on a weekly basis as a project team, both business and IT, to update them on the progress of what was going on with the eCommerce site. At this point, the project was in an R&D mode to find a solution for building an Internet model that would work for Southwire. The executives who helped make the decisions were hearing feedback every week from the customers. The executives said, ‘Take these requirements and find a solution.’ We went out and it took us about 3 months to evaluate. We came back to them with what we thought was the best direction to go. Because they were so heavily involved, it wasn’t much of a sell.”

“We have done something IT doesn’t traditionally get to do; we gave our business a new sales tool that actually generates volume for Southwire. Our sales force is selling the website, which in turn sells the product. In a way, the quality of our Web delivery demonstrates the quality of our product. It’s the quality of Southwire being shown there, that’s the name on the website.”

– Sheila Simpson

Southwire wanted an enterprise-class portal capable of meeting their current requirements with an open and flexible architecture that would track with the company’s future needs. Sheila Simpson recalls this phase of the project, “We wanted to incorporate our current eCommerce site, our current Southwire.com site, as well as our Intranet site for employees. We also wanted to provide a mechanism for both Southwire and the customer to manage security for the portal.” After formally reviewing four vendors, Southwire chose Sybase’s Enterprise Portal. Sheila says, “We were also looking at BEA, Interwoven and OpenMarket. We kind of looked at IBM WebSphere, but we did not get into a formal review with them. Sybase had the most open architecture. By going to Sybase Enterprise Portal we avoided being technology dependent in the future. We could leverage our homegrown customer self-service website and technology, not only the application but the technology behind it. We also leveraged our developer skill set because they were familiar with the Sybase PowerBuilder product.”

#### **Getting Off on the Right Foot with Sybase Training**

In the early stages of the project, to help the Southwire team understand the issues and nuances involved in creating an industry leading portal, they brought a

Sybase instructor to their site to deliver a Fast Track to Enterprise Portal course. The class helped them avoid false starts and future rework. Sheila Simpson recalls, "The training gave us a more in-depth understanding, I'd say if hindsight could play into it, we had no clue really what we were getting into when we said we wanted to do the portal. We thought it looked like it would satisfy everything we wanted to do. Once you pull back the covers, you really start to understand the details of building an enterprise-class portal. The training helped us pull back the covers."

### **Way Beyond Brochureware**

Historically, the wire and cable industry is not known for groundbreaking online automation. Southwire's existing EAServer and PowerBuilder-based My Q-Service™ website was conspicuously more advanced than any of their competitors and saw heavy customer traffic. The site became a valuable resource for customers, saving them time and money. Southwire noticed the average order size increased, the time to place orders decreased, and the customers almost universally accepted the website. Sheila assesses the competition, "We acquired General Cable. They had a website out there with a product catalog, but you couldn't order from it. We have heard a rumor that one of our main competitors has been trying to do this since we started our eCommerce site and hasn't been able to yet."

**"We are the only wire and cable manufacturer in North America with a site where you can place orders. We absolutely see this as a competitive advantage."**

*— Sheila Simpson*

The customers saw the advantages of the customer self-service solution and also saw areas they wanted improved. Southwire had several other offerings the existing website could not easily make available to their customers like a sales locator tool and engineering calculators for voltage drop, conduit fill, and wire code

names. Customers wanted different members within their organization to selectively take advantage of these new and existing features without being exposed to all the information. Using Sybase Enterprise Portal, Southwire developed a solution to leverage their successful customer self-service offering, address customer enhancement requests, and create a vehicle to give their customers more options and features targeted to individual roles within the customers' organizations.

### **Sybase Enterprise Portal— Wiring Personalization**

Portal personalization can have many faces, from the colors painted on the Web page to the content presented to the user. With Sybase Enterprise Portal, Southwire has extended the concept of personalization into the way individual content modules behave. For example, wire and cable can be ordered in a variety of packaged quantities. When the customer enters the order quantity, the order module can round the quantity to the nearest package quantity automatically, semi-automatically, or not at all depending on a personalization option selected by the customer.

**"Today personalization is almost passé, but we believe My Q-Service™ takes it to a new level."**

*— Sheila Simpson*

Sheila describes some of their personalization options, "Customers can choose which modules they want to see on the homepage and even customize the way the data appears on the order worksheet. In fact, most of the modules can be personalized to meet the customers' unique needs. For example, customers can add a module to their homepage called QuickQuote™ that displays the current price for the top five products, plus any number of items the customer chooses. Of course, customers can choose the colors for the website as well."

Southwire's personalization includes triggered and ad hoc alerts from Southwire's backend systems. The alerts are used to present timely information such as sale and pricing notifications. The alerts can be broadcast to all users and show up on the main portal screen. Ad hoc alerts can be set up to send information to specific individuals under certain conditions.

#### **Single Sign-On—Checking in Once at the Front Gate**

A primary consideration in developing their Enterprise Portal was to continue enabling the success of Southwire's My Q-Service™ website. Southwire wanted to seamlessly integrate the functionality of My Q-Service™ into the portal so customers could log into the portal, see the new features available to them, and still easily navigate to the familiar site. The team used the single sign-on feature of Sybase Enterprise Portal to streamline access to the customer self-service site.

Constantly signing on and off different applications within a portal diminishes a user's productivity, and from the user's point of view appear to be superfluous logins. Sybase Enterprise Portal is designed for efficient, centralized security. As a user moves between their available applications, Enterprise Portal tracks the original portal sign-on authentication and feeds it to other portal applications, avoiding multiple sign-ons.

Talking about integrating the customer self-service site into the portal, Sheila says, "We built a temporary bridge to the site from the Portal. Once the customer signs onto the portal, we were able to pass that single logon into our current eCommerce site while we were in the process of incorporating it into the portal. We were able to do that using the single sign-on feature of Enterprise Portal. When they sign onto the portal it has the new portal look and feel; when they connect on through to the eCommerce site it has the eCommerce look and feel. Eventually they will all be one in the same. It gave us the time to transition and not try to come out with everything all at once."

#### **Customer Backend System Integration—Eliminating Dual-Entry**

Most of Southwire's customers have a backend system for order origination. A recurring eCommerce issue arises when a customer places a new order on their supplier's website. By taking this approach, the order originates on the supplier website, not from the customer's backend system. The customer has to print the Web-based order, and reenter the order information into their own backend system. In other industries, it is easier for a customer to place the order using their backend system, print the order, fax it to the supplier, and let the supplier's order entry people retype it into the supplier's system. Because pricing for many Southwire products is dependent on copper and aluminum metals market prices and might fluctuate several times a day, Southwire customers using the My Q-Service™ site received a confirmed product price within 30 minutes. For Southwire customers the dual-entry of orders was a problem, adding labor costs and introducing the potential for costly and confusing transcription errors.

Sheila says, "A lot of what was driving this was customer requests. We listen to our customers and try to figure out how to solve their problems. For orders placed through our site, we gave the customer the ability to download the order they just placed in an XML or EDI (850) format utilizing the Sybase Enterprise Portal B2B integration technology." Once the customer receives the copy of their order in electronic format they can import it into their backend system without needing to reenter the information. They retain the benefits of ordering at their supplier's site, while functionally, the order appears to have originated in their own backend system with the correct items, quantities, and pricing.

#### **Role-Based Security and Content**

Southwire's existing customer self-service solution viewed each customer organization as a single entity and collected information from multiple sources or modules and presented it to the customer. Anyone in the customer's organization saw all of their customer information. Southwire customers wanted individuals, based on their job functions—or roles—within their organization to be able to view focused segments of the total information available.

For the Sybase Enterprise Portal implementation, Southwire developed a flexible, multilevel role-based security scheme where a customer organization has multiple logins with selective access to approximately 50 individual modules for functions such as placing orders, checking inventory, viewing order status, and engineering calculators. Individual roles have access to a subset of the modules pertaining to their job function. Sheila explains the customer roles, “Now we can allow their receiving folks to only have access to the order status and shipping information, but not the ordering information. The customer may choose to give their Accounts Receivable person access to the account module and their engineers only have access to the engineering calculators on the site.” With Enterprise Portal’s role-based security capabilities, different logins can see a uniquely optimal view of the Southwire site when they login.

The role-based security is not limited to Southwire customers. The Southwire portal is also used as the interface to the Southwire Intranet. Like customers, Southwire employees also have roles and individual logins.

“We have roles inside and outside of the company. We were striving for growth without a lot of rewrites. We wanted to give the business as much flexibility as we could without boxing anybody in.”

– Sheila Simpson

#### **Information Relevancy**

Sybase Enterprise Portal’s capacity for selective, role-based aggregation of content greatly increases the utility of the site for Southwire’s customers. In addition to corralling potentially sensitive information, an important secondary benefit is realized – that of information relevancy.

The temptation when building a corporate website is to put as much information on the site as possible, hoping the overall organization and categorization of the site will help the visitor navigate to the information germane to them.

“Most visitors don’t need or want to see everything that’s available in a company’s website. In fact, when sifting through volumes of information, the very content the visitor seeks is often lost against the background noise.”

– Haridas Nair, Senior Group Product Marketing Manager

The role-based capabilities of Sybase Enterprise Portal let Southwire present all available content to their customer base, while keeping it useful. This is accomplished by targeting it to the specific roles and users who need it.

#### **Empowering Customers**

As with most industries, Southwire’s customers are scattered across a broad spectrum of technical capabilities. Some customers wanted to fully administer their roles and security, while other customers wanted Southwire to be the security administrators. Southwire developed an innovative Security Administration front-end for both Southwire and customer remote management. Customers wanting to control their own roles are given a customer-level administrator login. The customer’s administrator logs in, creates roles, selects specific content modules to assign to the roles, and creates logins attached to the roles. By providing a remote security administration interface, Southwire empowered customers and reduced Southwire’s labor investment in ongoing portal administration.

### **Workflow from Vignette, Search Engine from Autonomy—Sybase Technology Partners**

Southwire is always adding new information and articles to their website to keep their customers current on new products and industry trends. Most companies have an article review process; once an article is approved, it gets sent to the IT department to post on the corporate website. To save costs, streamline the process, and avoid having the IT department be the bottleneck, Southwire built a workflow management system for approving content. The last step in the workflow process is to automatically publish the content on the website.

To build the workflow tool, Southwire used Vignette's content management system APIs, wrapped with a Web interface. Vignette is a Sybase Technology Partner.

Sheila explains, "The business has the ability to create and publish their own content in the form of articles or documents to push out to users, roles, or customers. We don't know how much content they are going to create. Using the Vignette partner piece of the portal, we developed a content management system that allows our business folks to create content, and through workflow, have that article approved and published to the website. We defined role-based workflow within our different divisions, and because we built a skeleton system, this process does not require any IT participation at all."

To help customers find posted articles of special interest, Southwire used Autonomy, another Sybase Technology Partner. Autonomy Content Infrastructure (ACI) is an integrated search engine used to automatically index, categorize, and deliver unstructured content. Sybase's Technology Partner Program identifies tools that work in concert with Sybase products to lower development costs and enhance the end-user experience.

### **Portal-to-Portal Integration**

Some of Southwire's customers who had been using EDI began using an energy industry portal called Pantellos to enter their orders. Pantellos was focused on the buyer side and had little to offer in the way of supplier integration. This group of customers was invested in Pantellos and had financial incentives to do business through the exchange. Initially this posed a problem for Southwire and they had to revert to a manual print, tear, and retype method of data entry.

Sheila explains how Sybase Enterprise Portal helped them integrate with a less-than-supplier-friendly portal, "Because this portal has not focused on supplier integration, we went from doing EDI to logging on, printing the information, and retyping it. We went from automated to non-automated and our per order price shot up. To solve this, we utilized the B2B integration Enterprise Portal technology to develop an interim solution. If our customers choose to use this marketplace to enter their orders, we logon to the website and electronically scrape off the information about the order and integrate it into our mainframe system without needing to retype that order. We used the XML technology that came with the Sybase Enterprise Portal. We encapsulate the HTML page into an XML file and then parse the XML file."

### **The Next Wave of Portals, Not All Portals are Created Equal**

There are several buying portals where a middleman is aggregating content from multiple suppliers and there are many vertical industry portals (vortals) containing content for a particular industry or area of discipline. Built using Sybase Enterprise Portal, the Southwire portal is an excellent example of a well-crafted supplier portal. It functions both as a site for customers and as the front-end to the Southwire employee Intranet. The unique role-based and multi-layer security scheme is applied both inside and outside the company and supports internal company workflows, which include publishing to the portal itself, giving the portal a degree of self-sufficiency.

**“A Portal can be an eCommerce Site, But an eCommerce site cannot be a Portal.”**

*– Haridas Nair*

An Enterprise Portal like Southwire's represents the next step in the thoughtful evolution of online content, evolving from a content rich informative website and Intranet into an interactive customer self-service site using a flexible application server, and finally transforming into a fully aggregating portal. The portal retains all the advantages—the content and the flexibility—of its predecessors. A true enterprise-class eBusiness portal adds adaptability, self-sufficiency, seamless access to legacy applications, information relevancy, personalization, heightened security, and customer empowerment, all with an increased ease of use. When Sheila Simpson said, "My Q-Service™ takes care of all the details for the customer." She captured the essence of what constitutes a world-class portal, where it possesses an inherent quality that approximates human-level service. Southwire used Sybase Enterprise Portal as a platform to build a useful eBusiness tool far more powerful than the sum of its constituent parts.

"Internally, we've had to think outside the box. We need to not only provide what our customers have asked for, but also be a step or two ahead of them. We ask the questions 'How can we provide that?' and 'What else will our customers want?' We've started asking, 'How can we webify that?'"

– Sheila Simpson

### **Gauges of Success in the Wire and Cable Business**

For any project, even when you know you've done well, it's nice to have external confirmation. With justifiable pride, Sheila relates, "I sent a couple of my folks who were learning B2B integration to a Utility Industry Group seminar in Washington. The focus of the seminar was on what they are calling eCommerce, meaning the EDI/XML portion. My people came back saying that most of what that industry group is talking about doing, we are already leading and doing."

"We have had some fun, and it is exciting technology. We believe 100% in the Sybase solution."

– Sheila Simpson

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