USS-POSCO
Improving the Customer Experience

Goal: Design and implement IT projects that will improve customer service and sales processes.

Why they selected DataDirect: DataDirect Connect *for* JDBC for DB2 was the more feature-rich – and affordable – solution.

Business benefits: Using DataDirect Connect *for* JDBC & ODBC, USS-POSCO has been able to sell more steel, faster. Customers have a better, more interactive experience with USS-POSCO sales.

Technical benefits: DataDirect Connect *for* JDBC was able to give USS-POSCO the JDBC specification compliance they were looking for, including support for scrollable results sets.

"DataDirect's products help us deliver innovative solutions quickly and reliably – regardless of where our data sits."

Rob Wunderlich
Consultant/Contractor
USS-POSCO Industries
www.ussposco.com

For more information, visit:
www.datadirect.com

A Simple Mission Statement, A Complex Mission

On USS-POSCO's web site is a simple mission statement:

To conduct business in a manner that provides maximum value to our customers, owners, and employees.

Rob Wunderlich, a consultant and contractor at USS-POSCO, takes this mission statement seriously, and has spent the last 10 years developing customer-facing applications with this mission in mind.

USS-POSCO sells flat-rolled steel, maintaining a list of over 150 customers in the western United States. Flat-rolled steel is a commodity material; however, USS-POSCO has long differentiated itself by offering innovative value-added services to its customers. Wunderlich has led the charge of bringing new services to the Web, further differentiating the company from its competitors. "The Web has enabled us to get closer to our customers and to offer them services that really make a difference," says Wunderlich.

USS-POSCO customers spend a great deal of money on their steel, and customer service is critical to their success. Four years ago, Wunderlich and the USS-POSCO Systems Development team launched the first in a series of custom-developed applications designed to improve the customer experience.

The first project was a web application for customers to check the status of their existing orders. Because this access was real-time, Wunderlich had some important factors to consider: performance, security, and advanced functionality. Because of Wunderlich's considerable mainframe experience, he knew that data connectivity would be a key part of his architecture. He began researching his JDBC options for his DB2 mainframe database in the very early stages of his project.

The next project – a documentation repository – took the place of an antiquated system of documentation distribution, putting important steel testing reports at the fingertips of their customer base. With this online application, USS-POSCO customers can quickly access older reports about steel they had previously purchased. This keeps them from having to maintain their own paper or soft-copy files. USS-POSCO's Web site makes it all available to them.

Lastly, the USS-POSCO development team tackled another customer service and sales issue. USS-POSCO offers its customer base discounts on excess materials, based on a daily auction. Previously, the process for this was a 1:00 am fax blast to their customer base. Customers would call the first thing the next morning to reserve their order. Unfortunately, this meant that customers in western time zones were at a disadvantage. Worse, the process was inefficient and hard to coordinate; sometimes sales reps and customers crossed messages and the materials weren't sold.

Rob had previously looked at IBM DB2 Connect as a JDBC option for his

DB2 mainframe data. Two problems with DB2 Connect prevented USS-POSCO from choosing this route: the high pricing model and the lack of JDBC specification compliance, which limited his ability to leverage key functionality (in particular, at that time, DB2 Connect was missing support for scrollable result sets).

As Rob was searching out solutions to the different scenarios, he attended an industry Java conference and heard John Goodson, DataDirect Technologies' VP of Product Operations, speak to the Java community about how to select the right JDBC driver for your application. Rob was impressed with Goodson personally, and remembers that "the voice behind the technology had a serious understanding of and commitment to that technology." After the conference, he investigated DataDirect Connect *for* JDBC for his DB2 mainframe access.

Rob's team was successful in creating an online version of the auction, USS-POSCO was able to neutralize the time zone issue and empower the customer to reserve and purchase their products on their own schedule. The result? Sales in record time, the very first week of launch. The development team received congratulations and recognition from the VP of Sales. Again, DataDirect Connect *for* JDBC was the technology used to access the DB2 mainframe customer and product data.

The USS-POSCO development team has also introduced new methods for streamlining the processes of taking "unconventional" product orders – requests for steel coils not currently offered as a standard product on the eCommerce site. In this project, DataDirect Connect *for* ODBC is used to pull data from DB2 for OS/390 to a Lotus Domino server. This data is then processed by a custom-designed workflow system that allows USS-POSCO sales reps to quickly determine the economic feasibility of fulfilling this non-standard customer request.

Rob Wunderlich has enjoyed being able to bring technical innovation to the steel industry. Says Wunderlich, "The quality of the steel we produce significantly affects the manufacturing processes of our customers, and USS-POSCO strives to deliver high-quality steel. In addition, we aim to differentiate ourselves in sales and service, and it's our data that makes it possible to do really creative things. DataDirect's products help us deliver innovative solutions quickly and reliably – regardless of where our data sits."