

Case Study

A4CS and MC Research

Automating data input for catalogue design

When producing catalogues, there are still a proportion of designers who manually cut and paste content, even though they are given the content in the form of a database. Whether your production is in-house or outsourced, you need to find a way to help your designers produce catalogues faster and more accurately.

Mitch Konstantinovic, director of MC Research, a publishing software company, understands the problems faced by catalogue producers. "There are many types of software and systems available to automate this process, but they are often over-specified, over-complicated and overpriced for small- and medium-sized operations. Problems can also arise in the techie vs. design studio arena, where most software requires an IT specialist who is unsympathetic to the needs of the creatives. Software can be used to re-purpose data from e-tailing sites into catalogue production, or create databases from physical catalogues to be used to create websites, but such software specifically designed for creatives is distinctly rare."

Gary Bigwood, director of A4CS, needed to discover a better way to utilise data. He was asked by The Building Centre to create a complex, data-driven catalogue that was in danger of running over deadline. The Building Centre has an online bookshop for which it also produces a physical catalogue, the content for both held in a database. "I didn't want to manually cut and paste the data individually from Access into Quark - I didn't have time." Gary knew from experience that, with last-minute changes, manual intervention becomes prohibitive both in terms of time and money.

Gary turned to MC Research for software that would automatically input all the data into Quark in a specific order and in specific sections whilst automatically dealing with different template formats. Mitch confirms, "We suggested our

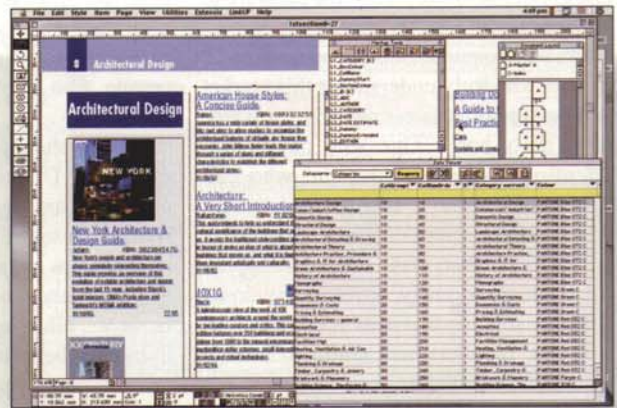
LinkUP! Enterprise software for The Building Centre Bookshop catalogue as the project was supplied as a multi-table Microsoft Access file with over 900 entries which required multiple sorts, by title, by author and also by alpha within sections. Also the catalogue needed to be generated using 'blank' Quark templates which would automatically be filled with the Access data."

Gary's task consisted of producing an 80-page catalogue of selected entries from the whole database, organised in book categories and sorted by authors within each section. Page headers/footers and indexes by author and publication also needed to be automatically generated. The ability to quickly pre-create index lists enabled accurate page planning, which would otherwise have been a slow process and taken him over the print deadline.

"All of the basic pagination design tasks are very time consuming, especially when your customer requests last-minute changes and products 'jump' from one section to another, or even worse when sections change order several times."

The software Gary needed had to have the ability to work from a live database and take a very short time to actually perform the build of the catalogue, allowing the database to be updated by the client right to the last moment. "We simply made the amendments to the core database and rebuilt the whole catalogue for proofing time after time."

The design called for different styles to be used for different types of featured entries. LinkUP! was able to select dynamically the appropriate template as it built the publication enabling very late decisions regarding the entry types for



each book. A simple flag change within the database signalled LinkUP! to use appropriate templates with or without images and with or without tinted framed backgrounds. "New Product" and "New Edition" logos were automatically included if applicable.

The most important aspect was the fact that template design and creation remained entirely within the QuarkXPress publishing package, entirely within the control of the designer. This approach enabled instant design changes with instant feedback from the proofs generated by producing actual pages immediately.

Once pages were created in final form, the software was used to export the data from the catalogue pages back to the database giving page positional information. Folios were automatically added and various indexes generated. Gary explained, "In every catalogue production, right at the end, when time is of essence, tedious index production has to take place." Overall the time savings in final production of the publication were immense.

Gary was very pleased with the results for this specific project and also, after investing in the software, that he could use it again and again for future projects. "For anyone out there who has to do multiple sorts, indexes, or has a data rich project then this could well be what you are looking for." ●