SUPPLIER EVALUATIONS - 2015

VISUAL 2000

whichPLM

VISUAL©
2000 INTERNATIONAL
END2END SOLUTIONS

VISUAL 2000

A WhichPLM Supplier Evaluation is unlike any other vendor profile, benchmark or review provided by other industry analysts. Our research methods and assessment criteria are exhaustive and expert, and our conclusions independent, unbiased, and informed by hands-on experience:

❶ **Supplier competencies and industry knowledge**

❷ **PLM solution technical benchmark**

❸ **Roadmap and development**

❹ **Executive vision**

❺ **Customer feedback**

GENERAL SUPPLIER INFORMATION

VISUAL 2000 INTERNATIONAL INC.

CORPORATE HEADQUARTERS

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VISUAL 2000 AT A GLANCE

Visual 2000 International Inc. is a Canadian developer and supplier of technology solutions specifically designed for the retail, footwear, soft goods and apparel industries.

Founded by Charles Benoualid (who today serves as VP of R&D at the company's offices in Montreal, and travels the world demonstrating his solutions) in 1997, Visual 2000 initially built its name on the strength of its ERP solution. Today, the company develops and sells a suite of what it calls "end-2-end" solutions, including ERP, PLM, SCM, BI and more.

As a close Microsoft partner, Visual 2000's solutions are built upon the SQL server, .NET and Silverlight frameworks, and the latest revisions of the company's solutions adhere closely to the design and usability standards of the latest Microsoft Office suite.

Visual 2000 maintains offices in its home territory of Canada, in the United States, in China, Australia and in Europe - including the United Kingdom. The company employs 65 people worldwide, including 12 dedicated implementation specialists, and works with several resellers located in the following territories: Europe, Australia, Turkey, and North America.

The Visual PLM.Net solution (as well as the majority of the company's "End2End" suite) is entirely web-based, and the company prides itself on the fact that all of its PLM deployments come complete with Business Intelligence and Digital Asset Management solutions as standard.

The company's PLM solution is a mature product, with an estimated 1,500 individual users worldwide. These users are spread across a large and growing number of what WhichPLM calls the mid-market, where Visual 2000 aims to deliver demand-driven solutions to the industry segments its developers, salespeople and implementers know best.

PLM SOLUTION OVERVIEW

SOLUTION NAME: Visual PLM.Net

DATE EVALUATED: 01/07/2014

VERSION NUMBER: 8.14.06.01

ANALYSIS METHOD: Remote demonstration and executive interviews

WHICHPLM EVALUATION METHODS & ETHICS

Here at WhichPLM, we pride ourselves on being completely impartial. This ethical stance underpins our day-to-day work, and shapes the processes we use to evaluate PLM suppliers.

When a software supplier approaches WhichPLM looking to have their solution benchmarked, we first explain that our methods go beyond technical evaluation. Although we do benchmark the solution in question (based on our own hands-on experience of PLM from its inception to modern-day solutions) we also take a more holistic view of the vendor themselves, seeking to understand their ethos, competentices, industry knowledge, and sustainability.

This extension of what might typically be a purely technical evaluation is done for several reasons. Firstly, increasingly educated customers are able to assess core PLM functionality for themselves, based on education gleaned from WhichPLM and other sources.

Secondly, we recognise that choosing a PLM supplier involves choosing a long-term partner on the basis of more than just software.

Finally, WhichPLM are today the only PLM analysts to offer comprehensive apparel PLM education (either self-directed or in a classroom setting) and certification.

Our ethical stance underpins our evaluation process.

KEY SUPPPLIER PERSONNEL

Name (left to right)	Position/Department
Charles Benoualid	VP of R&D
Tony Mather	Managing Director, UK
Chantal Chabot	Visual PLM.Net Product Manager
Sean Zhang	PLM Product Development Architect
Michael Cope	Project Manager

MILESTONE INSTALLATIONS

Name	Number and distribution of seats
OSC Group	More than 90 seats in the United Kingdom.
SRG	More than 100 seats in the United Kingdom.
Websters	More than 100 seats: Australia, New Zealand & China.
Kayser Roth	More than 250 seats in North America.

REFERENCE CUSTOMERS

J. McLaughlin	M Webster Holding
Aquarius	Charles Parsons
Vayola Jelly Fish	Hybrid Apparel
Mountain Equipment Co-Op	My Bilgi
Black Milk Clothing	Bollin Group

ABOUT VISUAL 2000

We consider Visual 2000 to be a stable business, and although the company does not wish to part with financial information, its long standing, continued developments over a 16 year period and continued sales growth in Canada, USA, the UK and Australia suggest that the company operates on solid foundations.

As its reference customers suggest, Visual 2000 focuses its efforts on the mid-market, and the vast majority of its customer base is comprised of retailers, wholesalers, brands and manufacturers with turnovers of between $30 million and $800 million. We consider this to be the vendor's "sweet spot", but this is not to say that boutique or enterprise brands should rule the business and its solutions out on the basis of size alone.

Out of the box, the Visual PLM.Net solution caters well to multiple different product types, including apparel, footwear, hard-goods and accessories. The solution offers a broad list of processes with deep functional capabilities. Like all PLM solutions, will still require configuration and a degree of customisation (Tech-Pack) may be required in order to cater for a customer's specific requirements and particular mix of product categories. Broadly speaking, though, the PLM solution is well-suited to the needs of retailers, brands and manufacturers within the fashion and retail sectors. From a usability perspective, screen refresh rates operate within the expected 5-10 second duration.

Being close Microsoft partners, the Visual PLM.Net solution operates on SQL architectures only.

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

Although Visual 2000 is a private company and is not obligated to divulge its turnover or indeed any financial details, the company was requested by WhichPLM's evaluation team to provide granular insight into its annual revenue derived from PLM for retail, footwear and apparel, and its R&D investment in the same.

Visual 2000 selected not to part with fiscal detail, but rather to provide high-level, proportional estimates of the information we requested. These are presented below:

Annual revenue derived for RFA PLM: 40% of total Revenue

Annual R&D investment in RFA PLM: 20 % of total Sales

INDUSTRY SECTOR STRENGTHS

1	APPAREL
2	FOOTWEAR
3	ACCESSORIES
4	RETAIL
5	WHOLESALE
6	BRANDS
7	CONSUMER GOODS
8	LEATHER GOODS
9	SPORTING EQUIPMENT
10	SOFT FURNISHINGS AND TRIMS

These sector strengths are ranked according to the extent to which they are supported by the vendor's PLM customer base and solution processes with minimal configuration or customisation, with 1 being the best-served.

OUR ANALYSIS

In order to assemble our analysis of Visual 2000 as a potential partner for a retailer, wholesaler, brand or manufacturer seeking PLM, the WhichPLM team undertook two key evaluation stages during our demonstration and assessment in July 2014.

First, we were given access to the vendor's executive team, whom we questioned on the company's history, long-term strategic goals, its driving vision, its financial and market performance, and their own personal predictions for the future of the retail, footwear and apparel industry.

Secondly, our evaluation team was provided with a dedicated demonstration of the Visual PLM.Net solution   Using our proprietary metrics and following the "day in the life" running order that we recommend for all shortlisting exercises, we examined what we considered to be key baseline functional requirements, as well as looking closely at the more unusual features or functions that Visual 2000 lists as its solution's unique selling points.

The results of our analysis are collected over the following pages, where they are broken down into four distinct sections:

* Approach & Overview analyses Visual 2000's approach to PLM: how the solution is sold, its architectural requirements, and how its functionality compares to market expectations.

* Implementation & Resourcing examines the resources that Visual 2000 has at its disposal in various territories, and looks at how the vendor typically handles implementation projects.

* Customer Distribution sets out the geographical distribution of Visual 2000's customer base for PLM.

* PLM Competencies lists the particular functional areas in which the vendor has chosen to demonstrate competencies (out of a possible 40+) and assigns a star rating to each, providing prospective customers with a method of cross-referencing the processes, functionality and competencies that matter to them against a composite industry average.

APPROACH & OVERVIEW

Visual 2000 sells a host of apparel-specific solutions, of which PLM is just one component. That being said, the company has seen considerable success with its "End2End" approach, where a single platform is sold, bundling together aspects of PLM, ERP, SCM, B.I. and more.

In the financial year 2012-2013 alone, the company agreed PLM-only contracts with seven retailers and brands, and sold its "End2End" solution to some twenty more worldwide.

The vendor explicitly targets small-to-medium enterprises, and aims to deliver value through an approach that they dub "in the box", where the broadest possible set of cross-application functionality is provided as standard, and then only those aspects that meet the customer's immediate needs are configured accordingly. As the vendors VP of R&D, Charles Benoualid, puts it, Visual 2000 aims to differentiate itself by offering "novelty, efficiency and automation – all in the box".

Under this approach, Visual 2000 considers itself to be the only PLM vendor to provide Business Intelligence and Digital Asset Management tools as standard with every PLM sale. Our analysis supports this claim, and this integrated approach can potentially deliver time and cost savings in the early stages of any PLM project. By way of example, the Visual BI.Net solution includes pre-configured cubes for PLM and ERP, and can enable customer IT and management teams to extract and interrogate data across solutions.

The Visual PLM.Net solution is 100% web-based – something it shares with the rest of the vendor's product portfolio, with the exception of its ERP solution, which is part web-based and client server. And while that ERP solution, Visual ERP.Net, is considered to be the "core" database for the "End2End" platform, Visual 2000 has developed its own integrator tool, Visual Integration Services (VIS) intended to facilitate integration between third party ERP solutions and Visual PLM.Net.   VIS includes pre-configured tables that can be populated from within PLM, and then triggered via lifecycle status updates or timed intervals. While the WhichPLM team were not able to observe a VIS.Net integration in person, customer feedback suggests that it can be an effective tool for customers wishing to buy PLM solus.

Our evaluation team had the opportunity to assess the Visual PLM.Net solution in its most recent form, and although readers can turn to page 8 for the concrete results of our inspection, the following paragraphs serve as a high-level executive summary of the solution's capabilities.

From an architectural perspective, Visual PLM.Net is fully Microsoft Azure (Cloud) certified, and can be installed on-premise or made available via the cloud. The solution operates on IIS Microsoft Windows Server 2008 R2, or Microsoft Windows Server 2012, and requires either Microsoft SQL 2008 R2 or Microsoft SQL 2012.

The PLM solution itself will operate on Microsoft-based tablets, and to date Visual 2000 has developed iPad-native applications for Sales Catalogues, Trend Development, and Digital Asset Management.

In terms of licensing, Visual 2000 offers the solution via named and concurrent license arrangements, allowing periodic access up to a set number of vendors from a larger community. The vendor also offers entirely free-of-charge full on-line license access to third party vendors and factories. We would recommend that prospective customer looking to buy Visual PLM.Net consider a ratio of 3:1 between named user and concurrent licensing.

Beginning with its ERP solution, Visual 2000 is beginning to roll out a new user interface modelled very closely on the style guidelines of Microsoft's most recent suite of Office applications, adopting the same ribbon and tab structure, and emphasising whitespace.

At the most basic level, Visual PLM.Net offers robust Creative Design and core Product Data Management functionality, with pre-defined processes and functionalities that can be linked to both pre-configured and configurable libraries. Additional PDM processes can be added through the solutions deep configuration layer, rather than necessitating customisation – except in more complex cases. Since complexity varies wildly on a customer-by-customer basis, interested parties are always advised to ascertain whether their requirements can be handled through straightforward configuration, or whether they will require more costly customisation.

"VISUAL 2000'S NAME IS BUILT UPON ITS "END-2-END" PHILOSOPHY, WITH PLM SOLD IN UNITY WITH ERP, BI, SCM AND OTHER TOOLS."

Adhering to pure functionality and the accessibility of data, Visual PLM.Net also supports "where used" style searching, with nested search functionality available across all modules. Similarly, the solution provides mass update functionality based on the data model that drives its search capabilities, allowing users to work in an Excel-like environment to update single cells or potentially unlimited numbers of data sources.

While this functionality is robust, the Visual PLM.Net solution does not support data synchronization in the event of lost network connectivity, although it does allow users to import and export offline data using Excel.

The solution includes Workflow & Critical Path capabilities that operate across all PLM modules and can also be extended to ERP and beyond. Presented in a widget-based dashboard, workflow & critical path functionality includes automation, notifications, and processes triggers that can be tied to product lifecycle status updates and milestones. The dashboard can be configured on a per-user basis, with additional widgets being added or subtracted according to requirements. The workflow engine can be leveraged to apply logic to grids (in an Excel-like format) or to fields and formulas that can be used to validate event-based rules for any product data type.

Line planning is present in Visual PLM.Net. It includes financial planning both top-down and bottom-up, placeholder planning, material and colour planning, and offers Excel uploading capabilities to bring in existing merchandising data from other stand-alone planning solutions. This is in addition to proven integration between visual store planning solutions like MockShop, and additional also to support for nested calendars which can be defined as seasonal, annual, or product-based. Child activities can be associated to parent milestones, providing comprehensive calendar management.

The storyboarding functionality included in Visual PLM.Net is good, allowing for images to resized, coloured, cropped, annotated, rotated and given theme and mood backgrounds. The handling of images is also supported by the inbuilt DAM (Digital Asset Management) system, which allows image files and all of their associated metadata to be shared between Visual PLM.Net itself, as well as a host of other extended-PLM and ERP solutions.

As the above suggests, Visual 2000 has demonstrated strong commitment to meeting the needs of designers and merchandisers, and this is demonstrated in its full bi-directional integration between Visual PLM.Net and Adobe's Illustrator and Photoshop programs.

With a single sign-on (SSO) design teams can directly draw data elements (materials, components, trims, colour and sizing information) from PLM libraries into both Illustrator and Photoshop. Visual 2000's Illustrator plugin then allows users to create, edit, upload and download images, tech packs, colour palettes and more – all without ever opening the PLM solution itself, an important element of the plugin is the bi-directional nature of the interface which makes the process more efficient for the creative users and requires fewer keying.

The vendor has not yet completed the same work for Adobe's digital publishing suite, InDesign, but we understand that this work is featured in its short-term roadmap.

In another welcome concession to the needs of product development professionals, Visual 2000 has established a global licensing agreement with Pantone, allowing its PLM solution to carry the Pantone colour library as standard. Visual PLM.Net can also be integrated to other colour standards, including RGB, CMYK, NRF, Bros, Scotdic and others.

We have already mentioned Visual 2000's decision to offer unlimited, free-of-charge access to third party vendors and factories – something of a unique decision – and the PLM solution offers a comprehensive supplier collaboration module, which can be configured to create a different environment for each supplier. Essential functionality is present and correct: specifications can be shared, supplier scorecards can be monitored, and Key Performance Indicator achievements can be tracked.

When dealing with international supply chain partners such as vendors, agents and factories, multi-language and multi-currency support can be extremely beneficial; Visual PLM.Net supports multiple languages, locations, and handles all major currency types.

Our analysis examined the built-in capabilities and we can confirm that the solution offers multi-language, multi-units of measure and multi-currency capabilities.

The solution also offers a flexible costing environment that can take into account most costing factors and algorithms, including BOM, BOL, freight, duty etc. to arrive at a calculation of the landed cost.

The costing modules can also be configured to support most kinds of production schemas (CMT, FOB, CIF) as well as both imports and local or off-shore manufacturing in most major locations and currencies. This allows for effective "what if?" costing, allowing the user to compare a range of different scenarios.

Finally, where international manufacture is concerned, Visual PLM. Net offers some support for sustainability and compliance.

The latest revision of the solution includes the Higg Index (a method of scoring the relative sustainability and ethical credentials of products) tables are included as standard, with data in the Visual PLM.Net tables matched to the developments made by the Sustainable Apparel Coalition in recent months.

Since the Higg Index remains in its infancy where a formal PLM API is concerned, this represents a positive step in the right direction. And the Visual PLM.Net solution can also allow third-party inspection companies access to the retailer or brand's data through the free-of-charge partner license programme.

"REFERENCE CUSTOMERS WERE SATISFIED THAT THEIR IMPLEMENTATIONS PROCEEDED ACCORDING TO PLAN."

CUSTOMER DISTRIBUTION

Region	Percentage of customer base
USA	50%
Canada	20%
Australia	15%
UK	10%
Turkey	5%

IMPLEMENTATION & RESOURCING

Visual 2000 currently has between 65 and 70 employees worldwide, including 12 implementation specialists. The company has strong ties to four implementation partner organisations in the United States, United Kingdom, Italy, and Australia, and its implementations are typically handled by a mixture of internal Visual 2000 lead resources and regional third parties.

Although Visual 2000 itself is focused entirely on the retail, footwear and apparel industries, customers are always advised to check the industry-specific expertise and experience of any third party involved in their implementation.

Visual 2000 reports 80% of its projects succeed on-time and within their allocated budget. This is a difficult statistic to verify, but the vendor assures us it retains 100% ownership of all projects until completion, and encourages its customers to put its implementation professionals through continuous on-the-job evaluation.

WhichPLM has since interviewed four of Visual 2000's existing customers to confirm these claims to the best of our ability. Of the small sample contacted, we can report that all were satisfied their implementation proceeded according to plan and within budgetary constraints, and therefore confirmed the vendor's claims to be true in their case.

As a Canadian company, the bulk of Visual 2000's customer based is concentrated in the North American region. Of its approximately 1,500 users worldwide, approximately 1,000 are located in the USA or Canada, with roughly 200-300 each in the United Kingdom and Australia.

The vendor predicts that the UK may prove to be its fastest growing market, and it expects that user numbers in that region may double in the foreseeable future.

Although it has sold to other territories, Visual 2000 currently maintains active offices only in Montreal, Canada; Essex, UK; and New York City, USA.

PLM COMPETENCIES

TECHNICAL ANALYSIS AND COMPARISON TO INDUSTRY AVERAGE

The most technical aspect of our Supplier Evaluations, this section collects our scoring of this vendor's PLM solution in more than 40 different functional areas, comprising what we believe to be the key product lifecycle functionality a prospective customer should be seeking. Each functional area is awarded a star rating out of a maximum of 5(turn to the following page for explanations of each star rating's meaning), with 5 representing the theoretical end point that we believe vendors should be striving for in each particular process.

This is a scale designed to last, and WhichPLM has clear documentation charting what we believe will be the future of PLM research and development over the coming three-to-five year period, after which the higher echelons of our scoring system may be reached by certain vendors. As a result, we do not expect to award any 5-star ratings during the first two years of running these Evaluations (beginning in early 2015) and, indeed, expect to award few if any 4-star ratings for the same reason.

To make this as clear as possible, the industry average score (a composite of more than 10 modern PLM solutions' capabilitis) is presented alongside the scoring for this vendor for each of the 40+ processes we assessed during this Evaluation.

Technical PLM Competency	Visual 2000 Score	Industry Average Score
Storyboard	★★★☆☆	★☆☆☆☆
Digital Asset Management	★★★☆☆	★★☆☆☆
Concept Development	★★★☆☆	★★☆☆☆
Merchandise Planning	★★☆☆☆	★★☆☆☆
Creative Design (CAD)	★☆☆☆☆	★☆☆☆☆
Creative Design (CAM)	★☆☆☆☆	★☆☆☆☆
Creative Design (Pattern)	★☆☆☆☆	★☆☆☆☆
Creative Design (3D)	★☆☆☆☆	★☆☆☆☆
Adobe Creative Suite Integration	★★★☆☆	★★☆☆☆
Colour Management	★★★☆☆	★★☆☆☆
Colour Licensing	★★★☆☆	★☆☆☆☆
Colour Integration	★☆☆☆☆	★☆☆☆☆
Material Development	★★★☆☆	★★★☆☆
Component, Trims & Packaging	★★★☆☆	★★★☆☆
Specificaion Management	★★★☆☆	★★★☆☆
Sample Management	★★★☆☆	★★☆☆☆
Bill of Material (BOM) Management	★★★☆☆	★★☆☆☆
Supplier Management	★★★☆☆	★★☆☆☆
Auditing & Compliance	★★☆☆☆	★☆☆☆☆

Technical PLM Competency	Visual 2000 Score	Industry Average Score
Sustainability	★★☆☆☆	★☆☆☆☆
Costing	★★★☆☆	★★☆☆☆
Sourcing Management	★★★☆☆	★☆☆☆☆
Purchase Order Management	★★★☆☆	★☆☆☆☆
Logistics & Tracking	★☆☆☆☆	★☆☆☆☆
Factory Capacity & Commitment Management	★☆☆☆☆	★☆☆☆☆
Quality Auditing	★☆☆☆☆	★☆☆☆☆
Collaboration & Integration	★★★☆☆	★★☆☆☆
Mobile Applications	★★☆☆☆	★★☆☆☆
Offline Capabilities	★☆☆☆☆	★☆☆☆☆
Reporting	★★☆☆☆	★★☆☆☆
Dashboards	★★★☆☆	★★☆☆☆
Business Intelligence	★★★☆☆	★☆☆☆☆
Document Management	★★☆☆☆	★☆☆☆☆
Graphical User Interface	★★★☆☆	★★☆☆☆
Multi-Language Support	★★★☆☆	★★☆☆☆
Calendar Management	★★★☆☆	★★☆☆☆
Workflow & Critical Path	★★★☆☆	★★☆☆☆
Mass Functionality	★★★☆☆	★★☆☆☆
API	★★★☆☆	★★☆☆☆
Master Data Integration	★★☆☆☆	★☆☆☆☆
Multi-Product Hierarchy	★★★☆☆	★★★☆☆
Support	★★☆☆☆	★★☆☆☆
Customer Advisory Board	★☆☆☆☆	★★☆☆☆

OUR SCORING SYSTEM

1 star = Acceptable (basic functionality may require more processing to achieve end results, further enhancements are required to the process)

2 star = Reasonable (reasonable functionality requires fewer clicks to complete processes, there are still, however, outstanding areas of functionality and further improvements required to the process or module)

3 star = Better (above average process and module functionality with automation & triggering, but a module that still requires further expansion and integration)

4 star = Very good (strong processing, good U.I., auto triggering of lifecycle management processes, more completeness of the module, but lacks the additional smart processing and integrations that would elevate it to the top)

5 star = Best in class (Intuitive U.I., smart processing, fully complete module additional evidence of integrations to related processes & solutions that drive additional value)

ROADMAP

A mature business, Visual 2000 has been in operation for many years, and has established a strong base of small-to-medium enterprise customers in its home territory and further afield. Throughout our evaluation, the vendor articulated a commitment to continuous development driven by, as VP of R&D Charles Benoualid put it, the desire to create "a value platform designed to make the user's life easier".

Having premiered an entirely new look and feel with some of its solutions, the company intends to bring this Office-like redesign to bear on more of its products in the coming three-year period.

In addition to this, the vendor is committed to a demand-driven mobile and e-commerce strategy, building bespoke applications for these purposes not because they would provide handy marketing bullet-points, but because their consumers have requested them.

Visual 2000's intention over the coming three-to-five year period is to offer more than ever before to its customers, and to secure its implementation and support expertise through a new partnership certification programme.

OUR ANALYSIS OF VISUAL 2000'S ROADMAP

During our analysis, a number of priorities for the future development of the Visual 2000 "end-2-end" platform emerged. The vendor appears to have identified many of these itself, but we have nevertheless gone on to briefly analyse them below.

It is of crucial importance that the Visual ERP.Net solution becomes totally web-based, and that the new graphical user interface present in that solution becomes standardised across the suite of applications. We would also consider work to allow the Visual PLM.Net solution to operate in an ORACLE as well as SQL environment to be a worthy undertaking in the short to medium term.

In addition to this, the vendor's intention to further improve its bi-directional Adobe suite integration is a sensible move, and one that could potentially promote Visual PLM.Net to the highest level of integration.

We are excited to see Visual 2000 continue to solidify its customer base in existing territories, but we consider it to be extremely important that the vendor put in place a partner certification programme in order to support further growth without over-stretching its existing technical, implementation and support resources.

Here at WhichPLM we often use the mantra "people, products and processes" when we're asked to pin down what makes a successful PLM project. The second and third of these aspects are well-documented throughout this Evaluation, but we do believe that people is an area on which Visual 2000 needs to focus. The vendor is enjoying growth in both its PLM and ERP business, which is encouraging, but it must remember that additional expert-level resources will be required in all areas of the globe to implement and support this growth – something that will itself take time and considerable care to develop.

EXECUTIVE INTERVIEW

CHARLES BENOUALID, VP OF R&D

WhichPLM: Visual 2000 has a broad selection of products beyond PLM. Tell us where you believe Visual PLM.Net fits into your portfolio.

Charles Benoualid: We find that customers tend to approach us with a very ERP-oriented, product-driven mindset. So we typically explain PLM's place in our portfolio as being an autonomous, fully collaborative environment for product development – but one that is fully integrated to the rest of the end to end suite.

Having a complete PLM solution then differentiates us from our ERP competitors, who use the acronym but lack the functionality to back it up. The difficult part for us has been educating the market on the difference between real PLM and products that are sold as such, but that would be better described as PDM.

I believe, for example, that we are the only PLM vendor to offer business intelligence (BI) capabilities as standard, and the same is true of our digital asset management functionality. These – and other integrations to the broader enterprise environment – have secured PLM's place in our portfolio, and its continued development.

WhichPLM: With that being the case, do you see yourselves as PLM vendors, ERP vendors, or as a more holistic solution provider?

Charles Benoualid: We understand that it's extremely difficult to be good at everything, so when our team commits to developing something new that adds value to our PLM product, we do it in extremely fine detail.

Our integrated BI tool is one example of this. Our true, bi-directional integration to Adobe Illustrator and Photoshop, and our bundled Pantone colour libraries are two further illustrations .

These are time-saving, user-friendly methods of bringing our detail-oriented approach to bear on expanding the potential of PLM. We don't price these things separately and segment functionality the way other vendors do: with Visual PLM.Net, everything is made available as standard, and it's up to the customer which pieces they want to use.

And whether a customer adopts more than one part of our own end to end suite, or whether they simply want to deploy standalone PLM, our purpose-built VIS,net integration and connection tool can link to any ERP system, any point of sale solution, any e-commerce platform, and more.

Starting several years ago, we chose to become much closer than before to our existing customer base, and built a much stronger understanding of their emerging needs. This led to our current approach of presenting existing users with a wider range of options

than ever before, rather than focusing exclusively on new sales.

WhichPLM: How has that strategy been embraced around the world? Where do you see the bulk of your PLM sales, geographically?

Charles Benoualid: At present, our PLM customer base is predominantly North American (around 75% of customers), with an additional 20% in Europe, and the final 5% in the Asia Pacific region, particularly Australia.

Our American users are spread across some 60 or 70 companies, since unlike other vendors we do not target large Tier 1 organisations, but prefer instead to build a diverse and loyal base of customers.

We have seen growth in the United Kingdom, but generally speaking we have found the North American market to be more responsive; we are in the process of opening an office in Los Angles to support that growth.

> "Customers should choose technology through an honest appraisal of who they are and where they want to go."

WhichPLM: What is the Visual 2000 mission statement – at both the corporate and PLM-specific levels?

Charles Benoualid: I make no secret of the fact that I am a technology guy at heart. My personal goal has always been to create an electronic canvas - one where all the individual components talk to one another, and nobody in the product lifecycle is left out of the future.

Collaboration and integration remain at the forefront of our work, and the three pillars of our approach to technology – whether it's PLM, ERP or any other part of the portfolio – are novelty, efficiency and automation, all in service of a better, more inclusive user experience.

Our approach to development is demand-driven rather than marketing led, and our HTML5 mobile applications and support for the Higg Index 2.0 are all being designed with concrete use cases in mind.

I believe customers should choose their technologies on the basis of an honest appraisal of who they are and where they want to go.

Our philosophy has always been to provide the broadest canvas possible, without customisation. To that end, everything we think a business might need is included in the box, and we never charge for separate modules that I believe add value to the PLM core – only the configuration and training our customers need to take fuller advantage of the opportunities we have built.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Visual PLM.Net is a mature product, with good functionality informed by experience, a commendable focus on integration, and a clear roadmap for future development. That development, however, must be balanced against stability, since our customer feedback suggests that a degree of fine-tuning is often required to make the solution reliable within each new environment.

This is not unusual within the PLM industry, and indeed most enterprise-level solutions present minor functional challenges at the point of implementation; we consider Visual PLM.Net to have a good, broad feature set, and to be truly production-ready with some small alterations.

Similarly, while Visual 2000 has a good base of implementation professionals and industry experts, we firmly believe that a partner certification programme focused on delivering experienced professionals in each of the vendor's key regions should be a priority.

Visual PLM.Net offers both enterprise and small companies a road-tested PLM solution, and one that has maintained rapid development and kept pace with customer demand.

With good mass functionality, and a focus on reducing keystrokes and increasing operator efficiency, Visual PLM.Net complements its technical competencies with a clean and clear user interface, but one that could benefit from standardisation.

The solution comes complete with a Digital Asset Management (DAM) module, which should not be confused with the more standard image library. A DAM module allows images to be stored and organised in multiple native file formats – CAD files, for example – according to a host of different metadata, and then leveraged across a range of Extended-PLM and ERP-related solutions.

Tied to this are the good storyboarding capabilities – something not present in many PLM solutions – that offer functionality far in excess of standard image whiteboards, and the pre-configured Business Intelligence offering that is also shipped as standard with Visual PLM.Net.

The solution itself is highly configurable and requires minimal customisation (as confirmed by WhichPLM's own experience as well as customer feedback), and offers good collaboration functionality in the form of in-built messaging, email integration, and power image mark-up functionality.

Dashboards and dynamic views operate extensively across the solution, and can be used across multiple devices and locations. There are several basic reports that come as standard with the PLM solution and additional reports (Tech-Packs etc.) can be designed and executed via customisation.

CLOSING REMARKS

On balance, Visual 2000 is a good prospect for any retailer, brand or manufacturer (particularly in the mid-market) who places an emphasis on design, digital asset management, and integration. But particular care must be taken to ensure that the solution's functionality meets your unique requirements, and that the vendor can offer sufficient (and sufficiently experienced) resources in your region.

On the basis of release 8.14.06.01 of its PLM solution, as well as its broader business roadmap, resourcing and implementation strategies, Visual 2000 International Inc. has earned the following star rating in September 2014:

3/5 possible stars, and an overall grade of "above average".

By way of comparison, the current industry average star rating is as follows:

2/5 possible stars, and an overall grade of "reasonable".

FINAL SCORING

Overall Supplier Score (out of a possible 5 stars)

★★★☆☆

"Visual PLM.Net offers both enterprise and smaller companies a road-tested PLM solution that has kept pace with customer demand."

"Particular care must be taken to ensure that Visual 2000 can offer experience resources in your area of the world."

FURTHER READING

- Visual 2000 website
- Visual PLM.net Mobile App overview video
- Visual ECOM.net Webstore Integration overview video

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