

HANSAWORLD - SALES ORDER PROCESSING

Product: HansaWorld Enterprise 5.1
Date released: July 2006
Price: approx £1500 per seat
Databases: proprietary and Microsoft SQL Server
Reviewed: August 2006

The company

HansaWorld is an international company, originating in Sweden. Its largest offices are in Sweden itself and in Estonia, one of the Baltic states in the Hanseatic League after which HansaWorld is named.

HansaWorld is different, both its marketing strategy and in its product. Perceived wisdom if you are an international software company is to aim at establishing positions in the major markets such as the USA, UK or Germany. HansaWorld did the opposite and aimed at the small ones. In Europe, it avoided France, Germany, Spain and Italy and concentrated on Eastern Europe, and has offices in nine of the 10 new entrants to the EU. It also has offices in all the main continents except for North America. It is, however, aiming to become a global provider and fill in the gaps over the next 2-3 years.

The package (also called HansaWorld) was originally written for the Apple Macintosh. It arrived in the UK in the mid-1990s when users started to change to Windows, and was at that time marketed as a small Windows- or Mac-based accounts package for two to four users. HansaWorld never made much of an impact. I've been reviewing mid-range accounts packages since 1992 and this is the first time I've looked at it in detail.

However, over the past 10 years the company has been quietly plugging away and is now starting to tell an interesting story. Realising that the architecture was suited to larger systems, it has consistently moved up in the market. Hansa still supplies small 2-4 user systems, but have been selling to bigger customers, and their largest site in the UK now supports 200 users.

Under its long-serving sales director, Stephen Jay, HansaWorld's main UK offices are in Parsons Green, south west London. Approximately 50% of sales are made indirectly through a small network of 15 VARs and 60 business partners. In the case of the larger prospects, and particularly those where a degree of customisation is required, the company will often deal with the customer direct.

The product

Released in 1988, HansaWorld Enterprise is a multi-departmental, business management package, suitable for organisations with between one and 400 users. It is, claims Hansa, totally scaleable and sells in three sizes:

- **HansaWorld First Office** competes against Sage Line 50 and QuickBooks.
- At the highest level **HansaWorld Enterprise** is scaleable up to 400 users. It comprises no less than 45 modules, and competes with Navision, Epicor, etc.
- At the mid-level is **HansaWorld Express** which fills the gap between First Office and Enterprise. It suits customers who want a one to 10 user system and a quick and easy implementation which is straight "out of the box" and without any customisation.

HansaWorld also has tie-ups with business partners where the software is bundled in a set of modules suitable for specific vertical markets. Together with business partners, HansaWorld have solutions in areas such as (small-scale) manufacturing, hotels, plant and equipment hire, retail, charities, construction (outside the UK), and facilities management. The price for HansaWorld Enterprise is around £1,500 per seat.

Design philosophy

HansaWorld (from now on HW) stresses that its software is designed for real-time applications. In a real-time system, as events occur, they are recorded immediately on to the computer, and made immediately available to everyone else on the network, whether it's the staff in the office running the admin, the boss on the beach checking the month's sales figures, the engineer in Inverness needing to know his next service call, the accountant working at home on her PC.

To achieve this, HW says, there are two pre-requisites. Firstly, the software has to be able to run on any piece of kit. Secondly, there mustn't be any extra applications in between in order to make it all fit together.

Key feature 1 - Technology

Since organisations often find themselves running different pieces of hardware under different operating systems, HW aims to run under **any** operating system - Windows, Unix, Mac, Linux, and any database - Oracle, SQL Server.

The software will also run real-time on mobile hand-held devices such as PDAs and mobile telephones. So if you need to tell your engineer in Inverness of his next call, you can tell him in real-time because he is running the same system as you are. Other vendors have to write a special application to link the two.

Speed is essential and users need sub-second response time to feel comfortable with any system. HW argues that in wide area networks it can comfortably achieve these fast response times, whereas with other packages you would have probably have to install extra hardware, software and/or middleware. For example, if you wanted to set up a wide area network linking half a dozen countries in Northern Europe, HW claims it could run this under broadband with no need for Citrix, whereas the architecture of most other packages would require separate servers at each location and leased lines.

HW also offers a customisation language, that is, a programming language which developers can write in. So if you buy a vertical application running on HansaWorld, the company claims you are buying just one package, whereas with other vendors you are buying two separate packages bolted together.

Key feature 2 - Integration

HW stresses that it has integrated the software modules into a single system. In addition to the standard stock and accounting functionality, it has implemented Activity Transactions to let people record their contacts with other departments and with customers, with automatic SMS, email and on-screen messaging to alert staff and customers. It supports a communal diary and has a Chat facility. When you arrive in the morning you can log in to Chat and communicate with anyone else in the company who is logged on.

Some other examples: suppose you run a web shop that is integrated to your HW system. When you set up a new product in the stock module and attach a photo, that photo is immediately available to the web shop. It's real-time and there's no need for any linking application.

If you use voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) to talk to your customers, there is a Skype contact field in the customer record. Also, HW is currently developing a CTI application so that when Fred from LousyPayers Ltd rings up our Service Department, the system recognises Fred's number, sees he's overdue again, and switches him to Credit Control.

The end-result of all this integration is the To Do system. Each user gets their daily To Do list, which lists all the actions they are due or overdue to complete today. As they go into the system to see each item on the list, all the related records are there for them to see.

DETAILED TEST RESULTS

Each front office lab test will cover one of four key areas - sales order processing, stock management, CRM and quotations, sales reporting. In this Sales Order Processing LabTest we tested how well HansaWorld Enterprise handled the various stages of a sales order - from order entry, through order release, pick, despatch, and finally the sales invoice. Test results are summarised below.

1.1. Sales Order Entry Header - VERY GOOD

- You can create your own series of tasks via the Personal Desktop or go into Register-New Orders.
- Good **string search** facility to find customer by part of name, address, etc.
- Customer order ref field is 60 characters - OK for MOD.
- **Credit limit check** includes outstanding sales orders.
- Can select from **multiple order contacts**, with their own email address. Good.
- **Order class** field allows you to link certain orders to the task management system. For example., an order received from the web shop automatically generates a message informing the sales reps. Good.
- "Closed "box allows you to **automatically wipe off** a small under-delivery.

1.2. Sales Order Entry Details - VERY GOOD

- Good lookup facilities to **search on part of product name**.
- Easy to look up previous orders to see **last price** they paid for this item.
- Good "item status" panel at the bottom of the screen to show **stock availability**. But no facility to double-click on OS or OnOrd quantities to see detail. Had to go into a separate report for this. [HW says it will include this in the next release.]
- Good **cross-selling** facility can set a part number to generate a pop-up message.
- No facility for user to **amend screens** by adding new fields, rearrange columns etc. Has to be done by HW or reseller.
- **Easy to use format editor** for customising order layouts, for example to give a discount column for business customers, but not for retail customers.

The order entry screen on the demo system was plain, functional and quick, with plenty of good features. It would be nice to drill down on totals and see underlying transactions, and to be able to amend your own screen grids. But overall it should be easy enough with HansaWorld to find previous prices, check the stock position while talking to the customer and taking an order over the phone. Good.

2. Order Release to Despatch - VERY GOOD

- Order Stock screen shows all **outstanding orders** awaiting shipment.
- Facility to display **O/S order list** at **LINE level**, not just header. Excellent!
- Numerous filter options to **select orders due today**, orders for one product, etc. However, the list of orders on the screen **didn't display the Customer name and Product name**. Not so good, since you can't amend the screens and have to call in HW to do it. [HW says it will include these names in the next release.]
- Can **print pick lists** individually, in a batch or consolidated. Good.
- HW has an integrated **Warehouse Management** module, allowing you to Put Away stock, etc. One customer has an automated forklift facility in its warehouse. HW tells the forklift which aisle to go to in order to pick the stocks. Interesting.
- Recording stock **despatch** downdated the stock levels, then looked at the Delivery Inspect screen. The software converted the delivery into an invoice. OK
- Separate tabs where to type in additional details of **packaging and freight**. Good

3. Sales Order Enquiry - VERY GOOD

- The Orders Browse facility has an attractive screen showing **ALL sales orders** on the system, but without any filter options, it was useless. The Order Stock report (see above) has plenty of filter options and we used that to find a **particular order**.
- In case of a customer who **doesn't know his own order number**, we went into the Order Journal and used the (good) search options to find all the orders for this product. OK.
- To check a **partly-delivered order** we went into Order Inspect. This showed order stages pretty well. (Del 1 = Qty Picked. Del 2 = Qty Delivered.)
- Order Status report showed all transactions relating to the order - deliveries, returns, invoices, credit notes. Good.

4. Sales Order Amend - VERY GOOD

- If the customer **changes the delivery date** of an order, a single change at order header level can update all the individual order lines. Good.
- You can alert staff to the change through the MSN-like **Chat messaging facility**

5. Special features

- **Customer special prices/discounts** can be applied to items or product groups.
- **Quantity breaks** by volume, value, quantity.
- Discount on **total order value** available as standard.
- Buy-One, Get One Free(BOGOF) facility available for retail
- You can amend master records in Excel, then **write back** to HW via Data Import.
- Date based pricing available, for example new prices to apply from 1 Jan. Good.

LAB VERDICT on HansaWorld Enterprise, Sales Order Processing

The HansaWorld screens are functional, but slightly lacking in modern facilities such as user-defined fields. Generally speaking, the sales order process from original order entry to final invoicing was clean and efficient. The overall design philosophy will be attractive to any IT manager who needs to run a single system on different types of hardware, especially in wide area networks and using hand-held mobile devices. HansaWorld's ability to integrate departments via Activity transactions, Chat and To Do lists is excellent. I was very impressed with this package. With the world of mobile data now dawn, anyone looking at a new front office system should investigate HansaWorld and see what it has to offer.

David Carter, August 2006