

Browser-Based System Good Value for Money

By Ernie Schell

If you've ever been to a dance club, with a DJ host standing on a stage deck working a table full of media controllers that feed a forest of speakers in a sea of special effects strobe lights, chances are your good time was made possible by equipment from Terralec, an audio-visual equipment and supplies company founded by Richard Lord in 1989.

Though his business started off small, he made a fateful decision to do his sales via a catalogue. When the Internet came along a half dozen years after Terralec got going, he worked with a programmer friend to design and implement a "brochure" Website, which was little more than a price list. But at least he obtained the www.terralec.co.uk URL, and by attending early ECMOD shows, he was able to line up an order management system to support his customer base, order processing, stock, and fulfilment.

Accordingly, the business grew. Then, as the dust settled after the 2000 "dot.com crash," Richard knew he needed to reinvent his business model and implement a 2.0 version of the entire operation. Turning again to ECMOD, he began discussions with an exhibiting software vendor, Cyrane, one of whose sales reps at the time had a mail-order background and knew very well what Richard was looking for.

This was a crucial bond, because it was clear to Richard that Cyrane, like every other system he looked at (there were many), had missing functions that he felt were essential to competing successfully in the audio-visual and recording studio business. But he had gone through a development project once before, and knew that if he took an active role in it he would get what he

needed, plus he would have a solution that could be more flexible and suitable than something "out of the box." The earlier development experience also taught him to have realistic expectations, and to focus on essential details.

Kit Management

One of the critical areas for Terralec is kit management, which requires complex bill of materials handling, with some kits pre-assembled and others assembled to order, with the ability to designate some proportion of many of his SKUs as "spare parts" to be used for repairs or replacements. Working with Cyrane, this was all implemented according to his spec.

As Richard's company grew, he also had to hire an increasing number of associates to handle all aspects of the business, including order entry and customer service. With normal turn-over, he wanted the system to be very easy for new associates to learn.

As the new eCommerce sales and marketing environment began to mature in the 2000s, content management became an increasing priority. Terralec always published a catalogue, but now it had to sort out what text/copy and which images from what sources would be designated for the Web and which for print, and which could be used for both (CMYK shows best in

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print, while RGB is brighter on the Web). He was able to work with Cyrane to develop bidirectional integration between Cyrane's solution set and the Adobe InDesign and Quark publishing packages, so that changes in either the Web or the catalogue material are immediately reflected everywhere they need to be, in the appropriate format. InDesign can also be used to produce tablet-friendly layouts, which is something else that he has worked with Cyrane to develop.

To The Cloud

Terralec is in the process of moving everything to the cloud, taking advantage of Cyrane's full support for cloud functionality. With Cyrane, Terralec and a related business Richard started called “Props4shows” (which sells to retail shops and photographers) can be configured for any type of mobile or tablet device. The mobile Website module is fully integrated with the entire

Cyrane system, which includes retail EPOS, telesales, marketing, customer services, purchasing, stock control, warehouse management, and carrier integration. There is also support for multi-lingual and multi-currency transactions, which Terralec has not yet engaged in.

“Cyrane has a very good internal control system for managing development and troubleshooting problems and issues,” notes Richard. “They prioritise their work well and are above average in responsiveness. The results meet or exceed my expectations.”

The only thing he would have done differently as he looks back on the last two decades would be to have done more direct dispatch and implemented it sooner than he did. “It's another thing that Cyrane handles well, and since many of our SKUs don't need to be maintained in large quantities, it is a much more efficient approach.”

All in all, Richard considers his work with Cyrane, still in progress, to be a “sound” investment. ☺