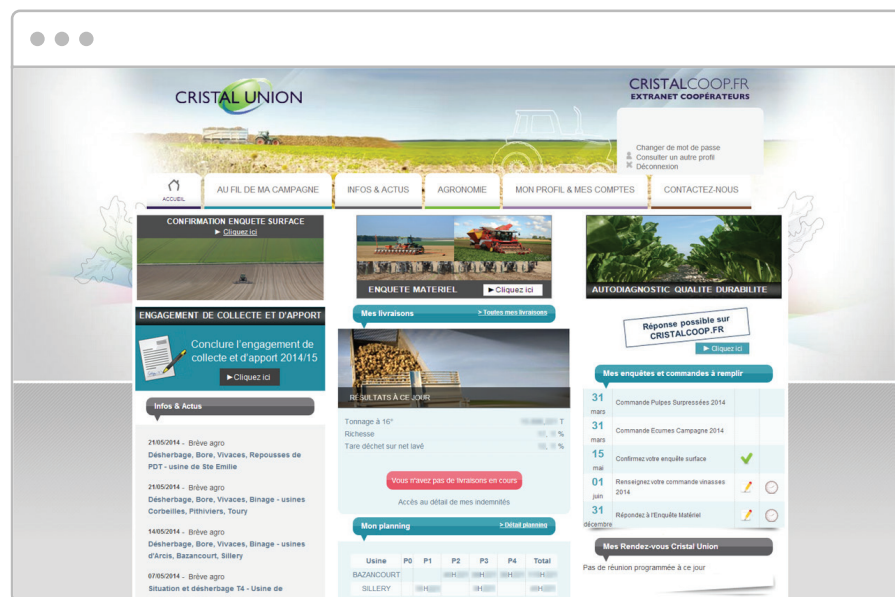# Cristal Union

www.cristal-union.fr



> We like the flexibility that Liferay gives us by allowing us to adapt the services we offer our members and plan the next stages in our development at our own pace

Jean-Christophe Chevalier
Head of Development Engineering at Cristal Union

## Organization

Who hasn't heard of Daddy, the sugar brand which has tickled our taste buds for 30 years? Or Erstein, for the chefs out there? Behind the unmistakable pink box and the Alsatian hat is a flourishing agro-industrial cooperative group. Cristal Union can count 9,300 beet planters, 2,200 employees over 20 sites in France and a recorded revenue of €2 billion in 2012-2013. This is based on its two main areas of activity: sugar (sold to supermarkets or for industrial use) and alcohol for industrial use (carburization, perfume, pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, spirits, etc.). With an average annual production of 1.7 million tons of sugar and 5.6 million hectolitres of alcohol/ethanol, the Cristal Union Group boasts approximately 40% of beet production in France and is ranked as the 5th largest sugar group in Europe.

## Challenge

To improve operational performance, the group wanted a complete overhaul of its Information System. Part of the project involved an Agricultural Information System (AIS) linked to a business extranet used by planters. But the extranet was old and had reached capacity in terms of integration and scalability. A technical platform was therefore considered. Four possible scenarios were outlined: improve the existing extranet, outsource the extranet to a developer, fully internalize the solution, or use one of the portal solutions on the market. The latter was eventually chosen and, after consulting several providers, Liferay was selected.

## Resolution

Liferay was the obvious choice since other solutions on the portals market proved to be too old and too rigid. "Liferay quickly stood out from the crowd", stated Jean-Christophe Chevalier, and there are a number of reasons for this. First and foremost, it is the solution's flexibility in

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terms of the way it evolves and the fact that it offers collaborative functions as standard. "We restructure the Agricultural Information System every year", explained Mr. Chevalier. "So we needed a simple, flexible solution. We also had to take into account the specific business requirements of agricultural producers and the need to integrate the solution with other IS applications when making our choice". Furthermore, considerations include online developments which are happening rapidly, web creation which is really taking off, and a team of 10 people who boast a number of skills, in particular using Java, and are recognized internally for their achievements.

These elements were also taken up by the Agricultural Department who favour innovation and new technologies as a way of improving the quality of the service for members. At the time, a developer suggested a solution designed for agricultural cooperatives and which was used by the vast majority of them already. But this system didn't meet their needs. The standard features on offer weren't a good fit; they wanted a "tailored" solution.

Finally, economic considerations also came into play. "Liferay costs very little compared to other solutions", concluded Mr. Chevalier.

## Business Value Added

There were several benefits for Cristal Union.

**Integration and scalability:** The extranet, CristalCoop, which was established in 2011, is fully integrated with the Agricultural IS and allows users to connect to third applications. "We liked the fact that Liferay could integrate with business applications because it means we can dynamically manage different populations and organizations", said Mr. Chevalier.

**User experience:** Close to 70% of our members, as well as other subsidiary partners (beet seed suppliers, transport, and loading companies, etc.) securely use roughly one hundred services provided by Liferay. Thanks to a unique authentication system, an agricultural producer can, for instance, easily access a Geographic Information System (Cristalmaps) in order to specify beetroot supply in real-time. To be able to do this, Cristal Union customized an application using Geoconcept solutions, who provide IGN maps to agricultural producers and internal beetroot experts.

**Membership:** At peak times, the extranet regularly records between 500 and 1,000 connections a day. Several Agricultural Managers easily and regularly update the content. In order to access other web solutions commonly used by agricultural producers, Liferay provides a secure automatic connection to Atland (land management solution) services.

Cristal Union is now considering going mobile (providing services on tablets and smartphones) and adapting the global architecture of its Agricultural IS. "Liferay offers an effective, accessible solution and fantastic support". We are looking into potentially expanding our use of the solution", concluded Jean-Christophe Chevalier.

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