

# Top designers in your own home?

July 27 2009

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(PhysOrg.com) -- A web tool that analyses sales and design data from European home textile producers, distributors and retailers is boosting product development - and industry competitiveness.

The AsIsKnown IT system for European home textiles producers, distributors and retailers promises major improvements in their global competitiveness. AsIsKnown includes inter-organisational sales support tools, supply chain tools and the ability to analyse trends and fashions in home textiles.

Using the flow of knowledge through AsIsKnown, the home textile companies can harmonise their market offering.

Customer orders are delivered instantly to the relevant product distributors and producers, resulting in greater supplier coordination, faster delivery times, efficiency gains and smaller stockholding along the supply chain.

## **Seamless selling tools**

Retail customers can use AsIsKnown's Virtual Interior Designer to access product images directly from the databases of the producers. Pillowcases, carpets, curtains or wall paints can be placed in a virtual room or changed with the click of a mouse.

A second sales support tool, AsIsKnown's Smart Profiler, enables a retail assistant to feed in a customer's ideas on styles, colours, patterns... and

to generate suggestions from available producer information.

Smart Profiler uses PROMOTE, an ontology-based knowledge management system to make better (semantic) searches of the producers' databases. In other words, PROMOTE turns a mass of data into explicit knowledge available to AsIsKnown's sales support and trend analysis tools.

Ontological systems search for concepts, not just key words. For instance, the system is capable of interpreting a search for "autumn shades" to deliver solutions that would include dark orange and chocolate brown materials, amongst others.

The AsIsKnown ontology can enable interaction between users who speak different languages. It is equipped with lexicons in English, German, French, Italian, Hungarian and Bulgarian. The ontology includes an inference engine for checking the consistency of new information, as well as a search engine, and annotation tools. The ontology ensures that the concepts remain consistent in all cases; their meaning will be the same independent of the users.

## **A learnable language**

Ontologies are often massive in scale and therefore very expensive to construct and maintain.

"[But] the vocabulary used in the home textiles sector is narrow enough to enable an ontology to deliver practical solutions," according to Uschi Rick a researcher from RWTH Aachen University in Germany and the coordinator of the Europe-wide group of researchers behind the AsIsKnown system.

One of the successes of the EU-funded AsIsKnown project is that it has

taken great complexity and delivers something that is intuitively understandable to the user.

According to Kiril Simov of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, and principal developer of the AsIsKnown ontology, it is difficult to present the information in a way that can be easily understood by the users, and it is difficult to build users' views into the domain.

The AsIsKnown tools have proven their worth to retailers, distributors and producers since 2007 - and the fashion trend analysis tools have also won industry praise. According to Rick, AsIsKnown can deliver to a typical small or medium-sized company in the European home textiles industry the kind of market insight that was only available to the largest companies in the past.

During the last year of the AsIsKnown research project, loading speeds, particularly of the retail tools, were substantially improved and the stability of the system was thoroughly tested.

A basic package is already being marketed by an Italian company, Crystal Design at [www.mycatalogcenter.com](http://www.mycatalogcenter.com), and a more advanced package is being made market-ready.

The fact that a product is on the market just as the research project concludes is a very good result, according to project partner Klaus Henning of RWTH Aachen University.

The AsIsKnown project received funding from the ICT strand of the Sixth Framework Programme for research.

More information: [www.asisknown.org/](http://www.asisknown.org/)

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Citation: Top designers in your own home? (2009, July 27) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-07-home.html>

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