

TOGETHER NOW

IT systems are hard to amalgamate, especially for a company with multiple bases. But a new hosted system from M7 has enabled all five of SAS International's sites to work in harmony

SAS International is a world leader in the design and manufacture of precision-engineered metal ceilings including chilled ceilings, which provide a new and environmentally friendly alternative to traditional air conditioning systems.

The company's products have been used in many of the world's most advanced buildings, including Chek Lap Kok Airport, Hong Kong, 30 St Mary Axe (aka the "Gherkin") in London and the Bibliotheca Library in Alexandria. Formed in 1968, SAS

has established a reputation for providing high-quality, innovative building systems that has resulted in company growth of over 100% during the past 4 years.

A NEED FOR COHESION

To address strong plans for further growth as well as the never-ending challenge to improve customer service, SAS identified the need for a new enterprise resource planning (ERP) solution as a cohesive replacement for their existing IT system. They selected Syteline 7 – a system

designed especially for medium-sized companies. This project was not simply about replacing one application with another, but bringing together all three manufacturing plants, the Head Office and a new business unit in Dublin with one high-performance, managed wide area network (WAN).

"We initially undertook a full review of our core business processes across all of our sites," said Stuart Morton, Finance Director at SAS. "This highlighted the need to change key customer-facing processes whilst implementing our new ERP system. We have a reputation for delivering flexible and responsive solutions to a demanding market. The system needed to support our business growth, whilst maintaining this position."



Ultimately, all sites would feel the benefit of greatly improved and facilitated communication with each other and a single, integrated ERP solution. "The idea is that a customer can now place an order with us that involves work across several of our sites, and we can manage delivery time across the whole order," says Louise Evans, IT Manager at SAS. "It streamlines the whole business process. It enables us to very easily share information."

SAS knew what they wanted to achieve and recognised early on that a wide range of skills were going to be required. "We had the domain knowledge about our business and how we could improve it, but we didn't have the IT Technical Infrastructure skills to design the systems or provide an ongoing delivery capability. We made a policy decision to outsource the design and

servers it is hosted on, while their clients pay a monthly fee to access the service via the internet. SAS opted to purchase their own servers and software, whilst M7 house and maintain them in their data centre. The BT IP Clear Network used to access them allows SAS to see response times as if they housed the servers themselves.

THE SCALE OF THE CHALLENGE

With SAS's new Syteline system replacing existing applications on all three of its manufacturing sites, excellent project management was absolutely imperative. "The biggest challenge was allowing key people from each site to join the project team without impacting the day-to-day running of each plant," explained Morton. "For 12 months this required a great deal of effort by these employees and support for them from the company."

more planned during the course of the year. With the basic system in place, SAS International can build other applications on top. Its sites are now linked by a Multi-Protocol Label Switching (MPLS) network – a cost-effective private connection which allows SAS to access its information securely via the internet. This gives the business a unified communications infrastructure and the opportunity to develop common systems as required. The next project is a single, unified e-mail system, plus a time-and-attendance system for SAS's 600 members of staff.

MOVING FORWARD WITH THE BUSINESS

"At some time in the future, as they grow, SAS may decide they want to build their own data centre," says M7 Managing Director, Neil Cornish. But until then the complete solution is managed by M7 over a three-year contract that includes support for the Infrastructure, Operating System, Database and Applications. "The financing solution worked well for both SAS and M7," says Cornish. "IBM Global Finance put together a lease that allowed SAS to spread their capital repayments for all the hardware, including the non-IBM components, over three years at a very competitive rate, whilst releasing the cash so we could continue to invest in our business."

"All our customers want to be able to focus and innovate within their core business activities," says Cornish. "We can deliver real added-value solutions that make this possible." ■

"We made a decision to outsource, and looked to select a supplier who could host and support the complete solution"

Stuart Norton, Finance Director, SAS International

implementation of the infrastructure and looked to select a supplier who could also host and support the complete solution." explains Morton.

A MANAGED SOLUTIONS APPROACH

To enable this vision to become a reality, SAS teamed up with M7 Managed Services Limited, a leading IBM and Syteline Business Partner in the UK. They provide a wide range of manufacturing solutions for mid-market customers, including the hosting of customer systems. They've developed a flexible Software as a Service (SaaS) offering whereby they own both the software and the

The rollout was originally planned for 180 users – however, not all of these needed access from day one. Using the M7 Blade Centre environment, a Syteline Test and Development Solution was quickly provided along with training machines and application trainers. This enabled customisation, technical education and some end-user training to take place whilst the production system was being specified and implemented.

Applications have now been migrated onto SAS's own systems and the rollout to over 200 users took place in March 2008, with

NEXT STEPS: CONTACT

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