AT A GLANCE

STEVENSON

Stevenson Group Ltd

INDUSTRY

Construction, property, mining, quarry management

BUSINESS OBJECTIVE

- Integrate best of breed vertical applications with new Dynamics NAV ERP
- Preserve existing 'hub and spoke' integrations
- Establish platform for future introduction of new applications
- Enable an innovative business model

SOLUTION

- Flow Middleware implemented by Flow Software
- Microsoft Dynamics NAV implemented by Theta

BUSINESS BENEFITS

- Integrated best of breed applications
- Seamless exchange of information between systems
- Proven support model for ongoing assurance

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Concrete Results For Construction Leader's ERP Upgrade

Written in February 2017 by Flow Software

STEVENSON GROUP LOOKS TO FLOW SOFTWARE FOR SMOOTHLY INTEGRATED OPERATION

When construction industry leader Stevenson looked to upgrade its enterprise resource planning solution, its earlier choice of Flow Software for the integration of various aspects of the business proved forward-looking. After upgrading from a legacy JD Edwards system to Microsoft Dynamics NAV (NAV), the existing hub and spoke integration model, coupled with the expertise of Flow Software and ERP implementation partner Theta, made for a smooth switchover from the old to the new.

Founded in 1917, Stevenson has strong roots in land-based businesses including mining and quarry management, agriculture and property.

Situation

Anthony Bitossi, Information Services Manager at Stevenson Construction Materials, says the company has complex technology requirements. "This necessitates the use of specific applications for some aspects of the business if we are to benefit from the best available technology for those activities. This means a single ERP solution to run all operations of the business is not a realistic option from an efficiency and performance point of view."

For example, he says Stevenson's concrete plant uses software from a vendor little-known outside of that industry –Command Alkon – which is an industry leader for concrete batching and dispatching.

Used by concrete plants around the world, it provides functionality that Bitossi describes as invaluable to the efficient operation of the Stevenson business.

Additionally, it has systems which control operations at its weighbridge and laboratory operations, but which are so specialised as to be outside the functionality of a general-purpose ERP system. These too are connected to Stevenson's ERP solution by Flow Software to provide best of breed capability, and an integrated system.

A major advantage for Stevenson, points out Bitossi, was the architecture of the original integration, done some three years prior. "Back then, we were putting in a new CRM system and new software for the weighbridge. While we had always had a direct connection between these two systems, we recognised then that putting middleware in would allow us to smoothly implement a new ERP in due course," he recalls.

It was then that Flow was identified as the optimal platform and, "These systems were then integrated into our outgoing JD Edwards system on a 'hub and spoke' architecture. As a result, when Theta implemented the new NAV system, it wasn't a matter of redoing all the integrations, but rather a matter of connecting the new system to the hub."

Solution

David Moncrieff, relationship manager at Theta, which handled the NAV implementation, explains that the integration of the weighbridge and Command concrete plant system allows for seamless exchange of data between the applications. "It was largely a case of unplugging JD Edwards and plugging in NAV," he says.

Sounds simple, but enterprise software projects are rarely described using that term. "The project approach started with design and analysis, with all processes documented and agreed upon, moving on to implementation, user testing and go-live.

On the integration side, our project manager worked closely with Flow and Stevenson to carefully manage any issues."
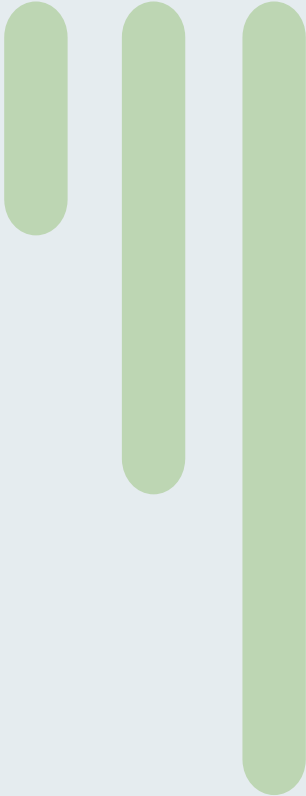
The complete implementation of Microsoft Dynamics NAV and the subsequent integrations between it and other applications, spanned some six months.

With the new ERP system, Bitossi says that if any other applications are changed in future, thanks to Flow, much of the integration is already done. "We don't have to touch Flow as it connects to NAV; it means we only have to deal with the side that connects to whatever other applications we might introduce. For example, when we upgrade Command, we can do that and run User Acceptance Testing through Flow, without needing to reengineer the connection to NAV."

Results

How business has improved thanks to Flow can be seen in several business processes. In quality assurance, where Stevenson's laboratory technicians were manually entering data to the company's QA system from Command, they now simply enter a ticket number. Flow automatically looks up the data from Command and passes the necessary information back to the QA system.

Other examples include integration of Command with tracking software SmarTrak; Flow exchanges data (location, load status and more) between the two systems to automate vehicle fleet control and management. Flow also connects Stevenson's weighbridge system with Dynamics CRM and NAV, passing data between the systems for enterprise-wide data consistency.

Bitossi says choosing Flow has proven 'a good decision to make'. "It is hard to compare what we have done with any alternative and certainly the transitions from one ERP solution to another hasn't been without its hiccups. But I've worked with a lot of different IT vendors and Flow has to be right up there if not tops in terms of service delivery."

That's high praise and he explains his view. "From a functional perspective, the integrations we have between our systems means we have clear processes running through the business. Flow allows us to have the specific application which is right for those processes at the weighbridge or the lab. The integration means it reduced the necessity to customise NAV to do these tasks, something which while possible, wouldn't result in achieving our strategy of a centralised integration tool."

Bitossi says these benefits are obvious to the business, but difficult to quantify.

Most important to him, however, is the level of support which is delivered by Flow Software. "This is key to the value we get from our middleware. We can go to them with a problem and they will solve it. The other benefit is that Flow Software offers good error checking and initial troubleshooting capabilities in the software. That means we can generally sort issues out internally, looking to see where errors come from and resolve it ourselves."

As for the business benefits of integrated systems, Bitossi simply describes that as 'crucial'. "Take the Command system. Every day it determines what loads go and on which trucks. That information must come into NAV for financials, billing, managing Accounts Receivable and so on. It is crucial that this data is flowing correctly, as this is our core business and where the money is made. Flow makes that happen."