

Bp marine

Business



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Company: RCMS Customer: BP Marine Submitted by: The itpr Partnership

BP Marine and RCMS have created not only a global order taking, messaging and fulfilment capability, but a component-based framework that other BP companies can use to create their own e-business applications." E-business" and " component based development" are both buzz-phrases of the hour, but with underlying techniques that are genuinely new. As yet, very few organisations understand how to apply these techniques for tangible advantage, and fewer still have married the two. BP Marine is one of the elite. With help from RCMS, it has shown how e-business can allow a huge and far-flung organisation to present a single, consistent face to its customers and suppliers. The component-based design of the methodology, known as " Genesys" has allowed BP and RCMS to open up possibilities for cumulative reuse throughout the corporation.

" Genesys" is based on a previous E-Project " Trident" which linked together the Marine business throughout the world onto a single system backbone. Ted Green, Information Director, Commercial Peer Group, for BP Commercial businesses, managed the " Trident" project for BP Marine and the " Genesys" project for the Peer Group. He says, " What our external customers have seen so far has been received very well indeed. As regards our internal customers, the fact that other parts of BP keep asking for something like Trident speaks for itself. And because we've got Genesys, we can satisfy those requests."

BUSINESS BACKGROUND

Part of FTSE 100 giant BP, BP Marine is one of the world's largest suppliers of fuel for shipping, making thousands of deliveries around the world each week and operating in over 75 countries.

BP Marine's lubricants are available in over 800 ports world-wide. In the late 1990s, BP Marine recognised a need to pull its regional operations together into a unified whole that could react instantly to customers' needs. A typical transaction could involve BP operations in two or more countries. A BP branch or agent in, say, Houston might receive an order over the telephone for fuel or lubricants for a ship owned by an American company but currently in Hong Kong. The order would be faxed to a BP supplier in HK who would check it could be met. The HK supplier would respond to the Houston office by phone, fax or e-mail to confirm the availability of supplies.

If refuelling of the ship was agreed, the transaction might need to be booked separately to up to three different sets of accounts, for Houston, HK and head office. BP had systems for taking care of the individual steps in a transaction like this, but Ted Green says: " The glue connecting these systems together was usually the people, and there was a lot of re-keying involved. The challenge was to build a piece of ' e-functionality' that could integrate the steps into a single process. We wanted to be able to take an order in one part of the world, communicate it automatically to another part of the world via our intranet, and then enter it into the accounts wherever was appropriate."

BUSINESS BENEFITS: INTEGRATION THROUGH E-BUSINESS

That's exactly what BP has achieved with its new e-business application, Trident. This browser-based application sits on a server in BP Marine's Hemel Hempstead headquarters, shuttling information between individual countries' ERP systems across the BP intranet.

In the Houston/HK example, order information is relayed to HK as soon as the order is entered on to Houston's intranet. The sales offer is passed back to Houston from HK, as is confirmation that supply has duly taken place. The e-enabled application pulls in pro-formas, prices and so on from various applications as needed. Trident has virtually eliminated re-keying - information entered into the system becomes instantly available throughout the organisation. The "glue" holding the different steps in the process of taking, fulfilling and accounting for an order is now e-business - electronic information flows - rather than manual interventions. The result is a clear increase in speed and accuracy of processing orders plus a reduction in effort needed.

But Ted Green identifies an even more important benefit. "We can now deal with a given type of transaction in the same way regardless of where in the world it occurs, allowing of course for national accounting and tax rules. That allows us to create a perspective that's not just international, but global. We can capture management information in a standard way, deal with credit lines in a standard way, and service the customer in a standard way."

Customers' lives will be easier as a consequence: "We can give shipping companies one statement of all their transactions with us, wherever in the

world they occurred, listing them by vessel. That's a great improvement over sending them output from multiple systems.

" It is also a step towards giving customers a single point of contact, in accordance with the precepts of CRM.

CHOOSING RCMS: THE ELEGANT ANSWER

It was back in early 1998 that BP started to think seriously about e-enabling its world-wide order processing capability. It had already implemented its own Oracle-based ERP system, known as " ISP", in place of the heterogeneous systems previously used. In ISP, BP had a standard approach to ERP, but there were still " silos" of information and transactions in each individual country. It now wanted to pull them together, so that a single process could operate across multiple silos.

BP knew what it wanted in business terms, but when it put the project out to tender, left it to the suppliers to identify the best technology for achieving it. Three out of five suppliers who tendered, including RCMS, proposed a web-based solution. So why did RCMS win out? It quoted an attractive price, but the real clincher was the elegance and practicality of its design. " RCMS came up with an architecture that was genuinely slim and mobile," says Ted Green. " Some of the other proposals involved a fairly chunky front end. RCMS's solution needs only a browser on the desktop.

That makes it easy for us to deploy and maintain, and it can work anywhere, regardless of the hardware and communications infrastructure that's in place."

THE PROJECT: A MULTI-WAY COLLABORATION

Though ambitious in scope, this wasn't by any means a long-winded project. BP Marine signed RCMS up to produce a proof of concept in March of 1998. By mid-1998 the concept was proven and the companies signed a further contract for the development proper. Little more than a year later, Trident was live world-wide. This was a joint achievement requiring RCMS to collaborate with BP's own ISP developers, as well as with teams from Oracle Energy Downstream and other third parties.

There were technical challenges along the way, particularly in the area of getting data from the ERP systems in real-time without adversely affecting transaction throughput. There was also intensive planning and testing. Ted Green says it is important not to overstate the degree to which a browser-based solution is hardware-neutral. " You have to understand the different bandwidths and processing speeds that apply in different parts of your operation. Since your application will run at the speed of the slowest element, every single piece of the jigsaw is equally important."

INVENTING GENESYS

Trident captured the attention of other parts of BP.

" People started saying to us ' how do I get something like that?'" says Ted Green. They were attracted by the ease with which a web front-end for order taking could be added to a system, and the speed with which orders could be processed once they were captured this way. The web-based architecture also represented an opportunity to make an application more widely available. Some businesses wanted to give external dealers and resellers

direct access to their systems via an extranet, to avoid re-entering data from faxes or phone calls. RCMS helped BP develop a generic version of the Trident software, called Genesys, which offers a backbone plus a library of software components to be assembled into applications. To implement the basic Genesys framework at a new site takes as little as three weeks.

Building a complete application is obviously a longer job, involving analysis of business rules and the design of new components (though these can often be carved out of existing code).

THE POWER OF GENESYS

“ Because they’re browser-based, Genesys systems are fast to deploy,” says Ted Green. “ Training needs are reduced too. And, as happened with Trident, this approach makes it possible to allocate staff functions far more efficiently. You don’t need to familiarise everyone with your complete ERP system – instead you can give most users a front-end that shows them the specific information that they need to do their job.” The same approach to tailoring the front end – configuring the system so that it “ knows” who can access what – is applicable over an extranet, providing a solution for businesses that want to give external dealers controlled access to their applications.

Already there have been Genesys projects in Portugal and Australia. With each successive project, the component libraries grow and Genesys becomes more powerful. “ That’s the beauty of it,” says Ted Green. “ The logic can be used over and over again, with the components assembled in different ways, and the amount of coding that has to be done diminishes on each project.”

A GLOBAL APPROACH TO THE CUSTOMER

Ted Green sums up: “ What Trident has given us – and what Genesys can give others – is a completely integrated system.

We can make offers of products and services to our customers globally, and deliver on these offers consistently, anywhere in the world, using a single delivery mechanism.” All that is possible through detailed, consistent information, available company-wide. A BP Marine marketing person can see details of a customer’s fleet down to the level of individual vessels, so there’s no confusion about what’s a container ship and what’s a cruise ship, or which ship is scheduled to call at which port. By pooling its knowledge of customers’ businesses, BP Marine can offer each customer the propositions that are most likely to appeal. Genesys is a continuing project in which Ted Green sees a significant role for RCMS.

“ RCMS has become a valued supplier and we have several more areas we want to explore together.” Apart from its technical knowledge, he values RCMS’s flexibility of response: “ It isn’t one of these companies where an alarm goes off at five and someone says ‘ that’s an extra hour I’m going to charge you for’. In fact, their manager sat here with me for 42 hours when we went live with Trident around the world. RCMS obviously understand that our success is also their success.”