Cray valley coating resins

Company: DigicaCustomer: Cray Valley Coating ResinsSubmitted by: DigicaCray Valley Coating Resins is a world leader in the production of specialist resins for industrial and decorative coatings and thermoset composites. A wholly-owned subsidiary of the French TOTAL group, the company employs a workforce of more than 1300 people at 11 plants across Europe and has a turnover of £200 million.

Cray Valley in the UK first outsourced its AS/400 and PC LAN environment in 1994 and appointed Digica when the contract was re-tendered at the end of 1996.

The Challenge of a New Environment

There is no question that Cray Valley has derived significant benefits from implementing its AS/400 mission critical business systems across the 230 PCs deployed at its UK Headquarters and Technology Centre in Machen, South Wales and its second manufacturing plant at Stallingborough. However, the migration to a more flexible, accessible yet diverse infrastructure has not been without its challenges. Cray Valley Logistics Manager, Philip Wicks: " Managing the new enterprise network has been a complex undertaking. The range of skills required to support such a demanding environment meant it was impossible for us to retain the necessary in-house staff at a cost that would be acceptable to the business.

" Delegating the management of its IT resources to an outsourcing supplier delivered the defined, predictable management costs and service levels the company was looking for. As dependence on the new environment increased, however, attention switched to how Cray Valley could achieve still

better performance and responsiveness from its desktop installed base. Philip Wicks: " Since we first made the decision to adopt network computing, we have continued to assess and develop the infrastructure to maintain our competitive edge in a rapidly changing marketplace." When the original outsourcing contract become due for renewal, Cray Valley decided to re-tender to find a supplier who could provide a helpdesk capable of supporting their 24-hour, 7-days-a-week operation. Having a helpdesk service available for a maximum of only 40 hours a week was proving frustrating to end users as it offered no out-of-hours point of contact.

Such is the pace of change in network computing that Cray Valley was also keen to appoint an outsourcing supplier capable of evaluating the possible applications of emerging new technologies, and of selecting and implementing solutions that would support the flexibility of the business. A Creative, Innovative StrategyAt the end of 1996, Cray Valley awarded its three-year midrange and desktop outsourcing contract to Digica. Of the factors that influenced Cray Valley's choice of outsourcing supplier, clearly Digica's status as one of the UK's largest midrange outsourcing suppliers and its installed base of AS/400s were decisive. Though less tangible, a good cultural fit was cited as being equally important. Philip Wicks: " It is never easy to articulate exactly what that means, but Cray Valley was always comfortable with Digica and, in particular, we liked their willingness and ability to work with us to design appropriate solutions in which both sides would have the utmost confidence.

" Once agreed, the service requirements including hours of cover, expected response times, numbers of people on site and performance measures, were

clearly defined in a service level agreement (SLA). The SLA also includes penalties should the AS/400 service fall below the contracted 99% uptime. Among the most immediate tasks, Digica transferred operations support of Cray Valley's two AS/400 systems to its datacentre in Nottingham. In conjunction with Cray Valley's in-house IT Project Manager, Digica set about analysing the existing systems, management practices and procedures to evaluate the efficiency of the company's AS/400 operations. The result was a strong recommendation to improve performance by restructuring the AS/400 database.

This was carried out by Digica over a weekend in order to minimise disruption to the users. Philip Wicks: " Since the AS/400 is a very stable environment, we were keen to focus Digica's resources on identifying and resolving recurring infrastructure problems, so we could develop and deploy new standards that would ensure a reliable and secure computing environment to support our mission critical business applications." The comprehensive desktop management service includes operations support, inventory monitoring, management of hardware and software assets, distribution and upgrading of hardware and software and compliance with software licence agreements. Key to the partnership is the end-user support Digica provides through its helpdesk operations. Calls from Machen and Stallingborough are now automatically routed to Digica's operations centre, and the 7 x 24-hour service ensures far greater availability of the mission critical business applications, substantially improving end user satisfaction with the quality of the support they receive. Helpdesk performance is

regularly monitored with a monthly review of statistics compared against agreed service levels.

Penalty charges can be applied if Digica fails to meet predefined service targets. Remote troubleshooting is frequently sufficient to resolve most problems. Where it is not, Digica staff permanently based on site at Machen and Stallingborough, can be despatched to perform immediate PC, server or network repairs and maintenance. On-site staff also provide a proactive service, suggesting measures to prevent problems before they occur. Philip Wicks: " This was a service the previous incumbent could not commit to.

The added value of an on-site presence is not simply quick remedial action, but being able to progress project work without the delays we used to experience." Beyond auditing the integrity of the Novell network, Digica's role is also to identify trends and suggest strategies for the future development of Cray Valley's AS/400 and desktop infrastructure. Digica is alert to opportunities for improving Cray Valley's effectiveness and aims to keep the company advised of options for modifying its IT operations as circumstances warrant. One example is helping Cray Valley to develop the right environment for remote access to the LAN from laptop computers, so the company can take full advantage of emerging mobile computing networks. Perhaps the most innovative dimension to the relationship is the introduction of an independent, six-monthly infrastructure and business strategy review carried out jointly by Cray Valley's own IT staff and Digica's Service Review Team.

Philip Wicks: " None of the other prospective suppliers offered us such an excellent opportunity to assess the success of our IT investment and focus sharply on any necessary development plans." European ConsolidationEarly in 1998, Cray Valley awarded an extension and expansion of the outsourcing contract to Digica, in partnership with BT and its French joint venture partner, Cegetel. Cray Valley was running its manufacturing software system, known as MACPAC, across five European countries, each with their own AS/400. The versions of MACPAC being operated were not identical and the use of the system had been inconsistent between the countries. As a result, consolidation, comparison and data interchange had proved difficult.

Skilled AS/400 resource had also proved difficult and expensive to locate. Together with its sister companies in Europe, Cray Valley decided to consolidate MACPAC on to one large AS/400 machine, and to outsource its operation and support to Digica. The new AS/400 is being used remotely from Digica's Nottingham datacentre and, in conjunction with BT's Concert Managed Network Services, Digica is managing the communications infrastructure supporting the sites in France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the UK. Philip Wicks: " Outsourcing has delivered our initial goals: predictable support costs and service levels, more effective management of our technology resources and a better understanding and control of our IT assets. With Digica, we are now planning how best to achieve still broader benefits from our investment in technology."