

A Blue Ocean Systems Success Story...

Blue Ocean Systems Assists MSA in Worldwide Business One Rollout



Safety First



Mine Safety Appliances Company (MSA) has been manufacturing products that protect people in hazardous workplaces throughout the world since its beginning nearly 100 years ago. Recently, in an effort to establish an integrated global information platform, MSA chose SAP Business One to integrate its regional offices and establish a common set of processes, tools, and standards, and added be.as modules for manufacturing. One of the company's key goals is to connect its subsidiaries with the SAP R/3 environment at the headquarters office in Pittsburgh, PA. Blue Ocean Systems is helping to drive business value with consulting expertise and to ensure the successful delivery and acceptance of MSA's software rollout — and its expected benefits.

MSA's safety products typically integrate a combination of electronics, mechanical systems, and advanced materials to protect users against hazardous or life-threatening situations. Workers in the military, fire service, homeland security, mines, and construction, among others, count on MSA's protective gear, such as respirators, helmets and body armor, gas detection devices, and thermal imaging cameras.

With demand for its products growing, MSA's executives saw the opportunity to better

integrate the company, which has manufacturing operations on five continents and more than 30 international locations, protecting lives in over 140 countries.

MSA had been operating as multiple business units running on many different platforms, including some that functioned with just paper and pencil spreadsheets. "MSA Brazil ran on an old DOS-based system for nearly 20 years," says Chris Kairys, Director of IT Implementation at MSA International. "We wanted not only to upgrade and standardize our operating platform in the various entities with a standard template to link to SAP R/3; we wanted to establish best practice processes across all business units."

In 2006 MSA's management team chose SAP Business One with be.as manufacturing as the company's integrated business management

software. MSA proceeded to work with Blue Ocean Systems because a key resource, David Smith, "was the one who understood our requirements" recalls Kairys.

Planning for success A significant part of the work focused on defining business processes. And during the time of the software implementation, the company also re-organized to combine the operations of the European and other international re-

gions. This change offered additional opportunities to consider process options and to define standards. For instance, the program team drew up a list of key processes and correlated 321 tasks that a non-manufacturing affiliate should be able to accomplish in sales and marketing, logistics, and finance. "The big

conclusion we came to is that the software is the easy part," says Kairys. "You can't fully configure the software until you have standardized definitions, work practices and reports."

A test bed was built in preparation for the first implementation, which went live in Singapore in March of 2007. "To date, Blue Ocean Systems has helped us install Business One at twelve affiliates, including the unit in Brazil, which also runs the be.as manufacturing software," says Kairys. Other locations include Malaysia,

"Our integration plan is to connect our subsidiaries running the SAP Business One software to our headquarters SAP R/3 environment so we are all working from a set of common assumptions with a set of common tools."

Chris Kairys

Director IT Implementation, MSA International

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Indonesia, Peru, Chile, Hong Kong, Thailand, Abu Dhabi, Japan, Egypt, and Dubai, for a total of 12 project installations in one and a half years.

Verify, verify, verify Commenting on lessons learned in the rollout, Kairys' says that data preparation is vitally important. "It's all about the data," he says. "Do your data prep and verification thoroughly."

He also notes how important it is to validate that people understand what is expected of them. Several months after go-live at one location he returned to assess how well people were using the new software. He found that they had reverted to doing their work in old familiar ways. "We asked 'how do you print out a list of all customers in descending dollar value for a particular time period?' and we discovered that they did it by hand when needed. So we showed how it can be done in seconds with Business One." His conclusion: "Trust but verify. Do an example and ask people to show you that they can do what you're asking them to do."

Continuing to mine for value Refinement of the company's documented processes continues as an integral facet of the company's globalization. For instance, about 50 sales and marketing personnel from all over the globe gathered at a "convergence meeting" in Pittsburgh to review and comment on processes that impact their domain. "We tackled 34 processes during the meeting and everyone contributed their expertise to valuable business process changes and improvements," says Kairys.

Blue Ocean Systems supports MSA's program management personnel in multiple locations, and continues to guide MSA on an as-needed basis, working flexibly alongside Kairys and his team during process configuration meetings, making sure that the software is configured appropriately, and helping to identify the areas where add-ons could prove useful. This is particularly the case as MSA moves toward integration of its subsidiaries with its headquarters SAP R/3 software.

For instance, the SAP BPC software (Business Planning and Consolidation, formerly known as OutlookSoft) provides subsidiaries that now close their books in Business One with a familiar Excel interface to a template that communicates with headquarters. Kairys says, "We are still building our foundation, and we have much yet to do to establish the links and managerial reports we want."

Today, MSA's access to information is vastly improved. For example, the old DOS-based system in Brazil required that managers wait for weekly or monthly reports before making decisions. Now information is online, fully transparent and available at a moment's notice. Managers don't have to print reports to get information. "The very nature of asking questions is iterative," says Kairys. "You form a question, get an answer, and then dig deeper. We can do it instantly now, which is an enormous benefit."

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Chris Kairys

Director IT Implementation, MSA International

Looking to the future

MSA is closing the books in Business One; management has met the goals of establishing a common software platform and common data fields; and now

they are assessing the challenges ahead.

Demand Flow Technology (DFT), an important methodology in lean manufacturing, is on the top of MSA's list of future implementations. Interestingly, an expert at MSA developed an application in this space that was leveraged for the project.

Also in the pipeline is a part number requester tool to enable a single part numbering strategy for all affiliates, with a link to the SAP R/3 Item Master and SAP Business One.

"I think it's remarkable that, with the help of Blue Ocean Systems, we have done 12 project installations in one and a half years," says Kairys. "We are glad to have Blue Ocean as our implementation partner as we define and work through the next phases of our strategic plan."



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