Great Lakes Cheese milks the benefits of end-to-end integrated information

Great Lakes Cheese Company Inc. in Hiram, Ohio, produces name-brand cheeses for major food retailers in the United States. Founded by Swiss immigrant Hans Epprecht in 1958, Great Lakes Cheese has grown into one of the largest privately-owned cheese companies in the United States, with 24/7 operations in seven production facilities in four states.

When IT Director Ron Barlow joined Great Lakes Cheese in 2000, the company's IT systems were unable to provide an overview of inventory, orders and processes. To grow the business, Great Lakes Cheese needed to be able to source production for customer orders from multiple plants, and an integrated view of operations was absolutely essential.

Ron Barlow comments, "Our business is one where we source a customer out of multiple plants, so we need to have visibility into inventory, and in a dynamic situation the system we had was just not doing the job."

Power – at the right price

The Great Lakes Cheese team reviewed two leading ERP offerings, and selected SAP R/3. Within a year, the SAP software had outgrown its original non-IBM hardware, and, with no upgrade path available, Ron Barlow turned to IBM for assistance.

Great Lakes Cheese has implemented IBM @server xSeries model 440 running a single instance of SAP R/3, including sales and distribution, product planning, materials management, warehouse management, financials, and controlling functionality for 250 Graphical User Interface (GUI) and 265 Remote Function (RF) users, while an IBM @server x345 supports SAP Business Information Warehouse (SAP BW). To provide flexible and easily scalable data storage for SAP and other software, Great Lakes Cheese has created a Storage Area Network (SAN) centered on an IBM TotalStorage FAStT700 Storage Server, which now manages in excess of 4TB of data.

"We chose IBM for a number of reasons. Other vendors could not deliver the same cost-to-power ratio as IBM, and IBM was able to provide the capabilities we required at the price we were willing to pay.

"IBM service and support is a critical factor, too. Behind the scenes, vendors need the capability to support their hardware, and with IBM you don't have to call back five times: they're right there.

Overview

■ **The Challenge**

Replace outdated manufacturing control system; Provide company-wide view of operations; Reduce product cycle time; Manage data more effectively; Extract business information more quickly

■ **The Solution**

Industry: Consumer Products
Application: SAP® R/3®, SAP® Business Information Warehouse
Hardware: IBM @server® xSeries™ models 440 and 345, IBM TotalStorage® FAStT700 Storage Server
Software: IBM Director, IBM Tivoli® Storage Manager

■ **The Benefits**

Ability to source production from multiple plants for a single customer to increase efficiency
Sub-second response times to business queries for faster management information
Ability to grow without increasing administrative headcount

IBM | SAP®

"Finally, the quality of the hardware: we've had just excellent continuous operations. Even where we have had an issue with the disk array, we just pop out the failing part, pop in another and keep running, without interruption while the kit repairs itself."

Slicing out delays

Whether an order arrives through EDI or is entered manually following an incoming telephone call or fax, the SAP software makes complete details available online, in real time, throughout the company. Process control managers have used this information to identify bottlenecks in production and reduce produce cycle time, a direct business advantage.

"With SAP and IBM we have been able to grow our business significantly without adding headcount other than direct labor," adds Ron Barlow.

"The major advantage is insight into what is going on right now: we can see what is on the production line anywhere, check inventory, look at delivery lead times and much more. When I joined Great Lakes Cheese, people were waiting up to ten minutes for a query response. Now, with IBM xSeries servers, we can look at packing, product, and status of any order or shipment and experience sub-second response!"

Growing a culture of productivity

While the SAP R/3 instance resides on the x440 server, SAP BW has been implemented by the Great Lakes Cheese information systems team on a dual-processor x345. SAP BW provides management information, and as additional SAP software is added, it will also be integrated with SAP BW. End-users report that SAP BW is easy to use, and allows them to create and maintain reports specific to their needs.

The SAP R/3 implementation project included consultants from BearingPoint, for business process development and configuration support; Psion Teklogix for RF software transaction development and hardware installation; and Matrix Industrial Control Systems for SAP system connectivity to the production lines. Each of the consulting teams worked closely with Ron Barlow, Sundar Krishnan (BearingPoint Project Manager), and IBM to assure an integrated solution was achieved.

Says Ron Barlow, "The excellent teamwork between Great Lakes Cheese, BearingPoint and IBM was a significant factor in the success of this solution. Both IBM and BearingPoint were focused on our success, and worked efficiently together to make it happen."

Efficiency – strength in low numbers

The information systems team at Great Lakes Cheese is highly productive: just nine members in total manage the entire network and operations, thanks in part to the reliability of the IBM servers. The aim is to continue to grow the business without adding administrative headcount, and Ron Barlow has specific tactics in mind.

"We use IBM Director to manage our systems, and IBM Configuration Manager to control our desktops and laptops, all of which are now IBM. I take a single vendor approach: find the best, stick with them and standardize. We run Microsoft® Windows® 2000 Server, and Windows® XP."

The main SAP software instance is duplicated to a remote site to provide full disaster recovery facilities, and a local failover server will be implemented in the near future to provide a faster return to uptime should the worst happen.

> *"SAP on IBM xSeries is everything we thought it would be – high performance at a price that makes sense for our business."*
>
> Ron Barlow
> IT Director Great Lakes Chees

IBM Deutschland GmbH
D-70548 Stuttgart
ibm-sap.com

IBM Form GK12-3967-00 (10/2004)