

WRQ® VERASTREAM™ ENABLES ALDIPRESS TO INTEGRATE LEGACY DATA WITH SAP® SYSTEM

ORGANIZATION

- Aldipress

WRQ SOLUTION PROVIDER

- Magnus Management Consultants

BUSINESS NEED

- Giving publishers and retailers access to usable sales information

SOLUTION

- Using Verastream Integration Broker™ to upload information from a self-made data warehouse into SAP Business Information Warehouse™

RESULTS

- Expenses reduced due to automated customer self-service and accurate distribution forecasts
- More than 120 million records uploaded in a matter of weeks

When Dutch publications distributor Aldipress decided to improve the management of their complex and growing distribution chain, WRQ® Verastream Integration Broker™ became a key to their success. Headquartered in Utrecht, Aldipress distributes magazines, puzzle books, comics, and novels to 9,500 retail outlets throughout the Netherlands, where it is the market leader. Aldipress is a subsidiary of VNU, one of the world's largest publishing and information companies. Among other VNU holdings is Nielsen Media Research, the leading provider of television ratings in the U.S. and Canada.

In 1997, Aldipress initiated a process to replace their back-office infrastructure (developed internally over the course of 16 years) with a new ERP installation. They evaluated three leading products and decided on an SAP R/3 system. Two factors steered Aldipress to this choice: 1) the strength and flexibility of the SAP solution and 2) the systems integrator's SAP-ready approach to the business case set forth in the Aldipress RFP.

The Aldipress Data Warehouse

In addition to their custom IT infrastructure, Aldipress had developed their own data warehouse and OLAP application. Every week, 900,000 invoice records are entered into that system. The data stored in the data warehouse is analyzed to provide demographic and seasonal statistics determined by prior sales. Forecasts can also be factored in, based on news headlines or upcoming events such as the Olympic Games or World Cup football tournaments.

Aldipress uses this analysis to propose the quantities and mixes of publications going to their customers. Aldipress' bottom line is affected by the accuracy of the analysis; every year they distribute 220 million publications to their clients, with as many as 95 million copies returned and credited. Therefore, the choice of SAP was a critical decision.

The initial plan was to couple the Aldipress home-grown data warehouse with the SAP R/3 system, but there were some problems with the warehouse. Efforts to extract data from SAP R/3 and load it into the existing data warehouse proved to be too time consuming and error prone. These upload attempts further revealed that the Aldipress data warehouse could not be easily modified—a key requirement in today's competitive market.

SAP BW: An Ideal Replacement

It was a logical choice for Aldipress to replace their data warehouse with an SAP Business Information Warehouse. SAP BW could provide the key tools to store and analyze the data that Aldipress needed to efficiently handle the distribution chain. And, unlike the Aldipress home-grown data warehouse, SAP BW could be modified to meet a variety of business requirements.

Aldipress decided to use the new 2.0B release of SAP BW, with Magnus Management Consultants (see sidebar on back) implementing the project. "Because the data warehouse application is critical to our business and because we were using the newest release of SAP BW, having a reliable integration partner was essential to us," said Guus Leufkens, ICT manager for Aldipress. "The Magnus consultants were all certified by SAP for Business Information Warehouse, and their

successful approach to the proof of concept gave us the assurance we needed.” The project to implement the SAP BW was executed in record time, thanks to WRQ Verastream.

Verastream: Tackling the Tough Integration Challenge

For the implementation, data cubes that addressed the special needs of Aldipress and its customers—the magazine publishers as well as the large retail outlets—needed to be designed. A key requirement of the project was to load 120 million records from the existing data warehouse into the new SAP BW data cubes. Because Magnus had already had a significant success with Verastream, they knew it would be the best tool for this challenging job.

“We had recently performed another project using Verastream and knew what it could do,” said René Peters, director of business intelligence for Magnus. “No other tool was even considered.” Peters also elaborated on Verastream’s “ETL” capability: “Extraction—the data import tools are easy to configure. Transformation—the scripts provide an extraordinary degree of flexibility. Loading—connects seamlessly to SAP BW.”

How Was the Solution Implemented?

The old Aldipress data warehouse was stored on an HP 3000 in an Allbase database, so WRQ installed their HP 3000 Verastream Data Server together with the Verastream adapter for Business Warehouse, as a preliminary testing ground. Initial tests showed that this environment would not be ideal for the implementation.

Because the data warehouse is a living application—still running and providing services—it is essential that any data-set uploads into the new SAP BW take no longer than the period between update cycles for that data set. Although both Verastream and SAP BW could handle much higher throughputs, the Allbase database could not keep pace with the data uploads. The largest aggregated data set, 18 million records, is refreshed weekly. Verastream could upload that data set at a rate of more than 1 million records per hour. At 18 hours for this data set, it was well within the margins required.

The performance of the server was a particular challenge for the project team. But a perfect example of cooperation evolved between customer, integrator, and

vendor when expert consultants from WRQ agreed to optimize the scripts used in the process adapter to get the best possible performance out of the system. “The role played by WRQ brought an essential balance to the project team that allowed work to proceed calmly,” said Leufkens.

The Verastream Advantage

Verastream proved its worth early on in the project. The ease of adjusting scripts to data sets and the direct pipeline between the HP 3000 and the SAP BW were dramatic improvements to the delays and errors in the earlier attempt to couple the SAP R/3 system with the old data warehouse application. Eliminating the requirement to use intermediate files and tables improved processing time and prevented transformation errors.

“There was an enormous amount of data to be transported,” said Peters. “Many transformation routines needed frequent adaptation to properly convert the data being passed from one system to another. The efficiency and flexibility of the scripts really paid off there.”

Customer Self-Service Means Savings for Aldipress

A key advantage of the new SAP BW system is that the magazine publishers and major retailers can now go online to get timely information on publication sales. Here’s an example of the importance of that capability: When a magazine undergoes a redesign, the publishers want to measure the effect on retail sales as soon as possible. With the old system, publishers had to wait a week or more after publication to assess the effect on sales. But the new reports from SAP BW can present data the very next day, so the publishers can get timely information via the extranet.

For certain retailers, the advantages are even greater. Previously, they could get their statistics only once every quarter, when they met with the Aldipress sales representative. Now they’ll have access to daily data via the web. Suppliers and retailers alike will be able to base their business decisions on the most immediate data possible.

Aldipress is now ready to look ahead to further integration, both internally and externally. Leufkens concluded, “Now that we’ve seen what WRQ and Verastream can do, we will most certainly look to them for future integration solutions.”

About WRQ

WRQ provides innovative technology for solving the most challenging business problems. For more than 20 years, WRQ has been helping Fortune 500 companies access and integrate information, so they can transform the way they do business. With more than eight million users worldwide, WRQ is one of the top software companies in the U.S. and is consistently recognized for its award-winning products. A privately held company, WRQ is ranked as one of the "100 Best Companies to Work for" by *Fortune* magazine. The company offers its software and services in 51 countries through a global network of business partners. For more information, visit the company's web site at www.wrq.com.

ABOUT MAGNUS MANAGEMENT CONSULTANTS

Magnus Management Consultants is an international management consulting firm founded in 1990 and headquartered in Naarden, the Netherlands. Magnus works to integrate the software applications of different suppliers to create company-specific, custom-built solutions in a wide range of sectors, particularly trade and industry. They specialize in the implementation of solutions for e-business, supply chain management, and enterprise systems.

Magnus employs more than 500 people in worldwide cities including Atlanta, Bangkok, Brussels, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, Manila, Melbourne, and Singapore, in addition to cities throughout the Netherlands. The company has been listed on the AEX since 1998.

Magnus has successfully completed more than 250 projects in a wide range of industries, all over the world. Independent research in this market has shown an average of 50 percent of implementations are completed on time and within budget. In contrast, 95 percent of the Magnus projects are completed on time and within budget.



Corporate Headquarters

1500 Dexter Avenue North
Seattle, Washington 98109
TEL 206 217 7500
800 872 2829
FAX 206 217 7515

European Headquarters

The Netherlands
TEL +31 70 375 1100
FAX +31 70 356 1244

Asia Pacific Headquarters

Singapore
TEL +65 336 3122
FAX +65 336 5233

WRQ.COM

EMAIL info@wrq.com

For regional office information, visit www.wrq.com.

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