

Lead to Cash Project Management Business Intelligence



Success Story
Engineering,
Construction &
Operations

Graham Packaging called on ICM America To tie up the loose ends.

Graham Packaging produces plastic packaging you see every day from companies such as Procter & Gamble, Colgate-Palmolive, Pennzoil-Quaker State, Tropicana, Unilever, Valvoline, Castrol, Ocean Spray and others, and you'll have a visual résumé for one of ICM America's brighter success stories.

York, PA- based Graham Packaging designs, manufactures, and sells custom blow-molded plastic containers for the branded food and beverage, household and personal care, and automotive lubricants markets. In the past decade, Graham Packaging has evolved from a regional supplier of high-density polyethylene (HDPE) plastic bottles to a global industry leader in custom plastic packaging, with 60 plants spanning three continents.

Specialists needed to Manage

The challenges of expansion and the complexity of global business processes drove the decision to replace Graham's disparate, heterogeneous systems with SAP Business Platform. "We were a global company using local systems," said Jeff Rishel, Graham Packaging's IT Director.

This initiative began with a leading global consulting firm to provide implementation and integration services. "We went live in a big way with lots of modules," Rishel said "However, post 'go-live' we quickly learned that these modules needed lots of improvements, just as we were ready to scale globally."

End-user surprises and complaints – often representing severe issues, and resulting in operational errors and delays came up on almost a daily basis. But these weren't the only challenges Graham Packaging was facing.

Due to merger and acquisition activity, Graham Packaging found itself with manufacturing sites in three European countries (U.K., France, Germany).

In response, Graham Packaging took a bold step: Rishel

dismissed the consulting firm originally engaged for the SAP implementation. "While close to twenty consultants were working on our engagement, there was perhaps one whose insights were truly beneficial," he said. "Basically, we were providing this consulting firm with a learning lab for their less experienced SAP consultants."

"We have very highly skilled in-house resources, so we were looking for a source that knew more than we did, who would challenge our ways of thinking if required, and give us the answers we needed."

To save this project and prevent further loss of productivity and revenue, Graham Packaging chose ICM America.

Rishel commented, "We were impressed with ICM's level of sophistication and ability to quickly assess our needs."

We've earned our money anytime we're able to remove the volatility that comes to organizations pursuing for the first time the potential gains promised by Business Applications, data warehouses,



global or collaborative production scheduling software programs, or other “bleeding edge” productivity technologies. Primarily, we do this by making heavy investments in the consultants that have shown us they understand the context of applying software to business constraints, rather than merely an advanced knowledge of the software itself.

Assessing the situation

The good news at the beginning of the six-month countdown was that Graham Packaging still had an SAP-literate team of their own employees. When ICM stepped in, there had not been enough time elapsed for any of the key employees to forget what they had learned during the initial implementation.

The overall technical knowledge of Graham Packaging’s internal team was very high.

Unfortunately, they hadn’t had enough exposure to SAP Solutions yet to quickly diagnose either the dozens of little problems that were occurring or the handful of extremely complicated design flaws.

This immediate need was acting like a black hole, consuming all of the time they had hoped to

dedicate to their Europe roll-out effort.

Now for another complication, the Euro currency had just been introduced. Therefore an extra complexity to the SAP Business Platform design roll-out to the Europe sites became the need to allow for the eventual (in year 2002) elimination of transactions performed in French francs, German marks, Italian lira and so on.

Rishel was confident in ICM’s assessment of the situation and proposed strategy, he said “You heard issues and offered solutions. The mission was to educate us, so we’ll never have to call him for the same question twice. That kind of attitude told us the truly wanted to make Graham Packaging successful.”

Lead to Cash with two ICM America Consultants

The entire roll-out was accomplished in five months, using just two full-time ICM consultants. One consultant developed with the Graham Packaging project managers a long-term Euro currency strategy and traveled with the Graham Packaging internal team to three countries to set up country-specific designs for things such as INTRASTAT reporting and French government-mandated

G/L account numbering options.

Back at the York headquarters of Graham Packaging, the other consultant absorbed the burden of resolving the many difficulties with errors and data interpretations that the U.S. users were discovering.

The two consultants, together, coordinated their work efforts so that a design change in North America or Europe could be integrated into the design of the other.

These consultants had been specifically trained in the areas of the software’s design that Graham Packaging’s internal team was not quite ready to take on – European Trade Regulations, and SAP Cross-Module Integration.

As an example, taking a ‘one-to-many’ path with the FI/CO Chart of Accounts design decision accelerated the global roll-outs. One thing we focused on immediately was whether the speed and simplicity benefits from having each country that Graham Packaging operated in use the same SAP Chart of Accounts code would lead to an unpleasantly negative surprise just before or just after ‘Go Live’. As it turns out, despite the requirements (in some cases,



country-specific legal requirements) for unique accounting and reporting, the clarity of what we needed to accomplish allowed us to find some standard SAP functionality that met the requirements without resorting to assigning each country its own, unique SAP Chart of Accounts code.

Moving forward

Rishel turned to ICM for additional projects such as HR and QM.

"ICM's consultants not only deliver the right expertise for the specific project in question, they are also extremely attuned to the demands of our business in general. They are very proactive in recommending new approaches to improve our processes and productivity."

Said Rishel

Graham Packaging has continued to work with ICM on various phases of SAP optimization. "At present, we're testing an XML-based procurement platform with a major global consumer goods company," Rishel added "In the long run, we think this will equip us with definite competitive advantages, as we expand this capability to other current and potential customers."

Improving Business Intelligence

As an example of how ICM helps its customers avoid the risks inherent in learning new technologies, ICM sought out and partnered with arcplan Inc., a leading vendor of front-end analytic solutions for the OLAP and RDBMS market. Arcplan's dynaSight® software permits direct access to many types of data sources (such as SAP), as well as quick and simple analysis and professional visualization of data for every hierarchical level.

As it turns out, Graham Packaging's report analysts found the DynaSight's report navigation to be considerably more intuitive to use with SAP data than the standard front-end offering. As a result, more people began to access online company reports, and fewer users felt the need to download report data to their local hard drives in the form of a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet.

"Is the best thing that happened to our SAP implementation. Time is now spent on analysis and taking action rather than data retrieval."

According to Rishel, "It's the first thing the CFO and COO look at in the morning. All it takes is a mouse click to bring up an 'executive dashboard' and they

can drill down into multiple dimensions, such as business, company, customer, plant, etc.

Rishel concluded, "ICM is an ideal partner for our long-term success. When we run into a brick wall with a new technology, they'll come in and knock it down. But perhaps most importantly, they're generous with their expertise. Thanks to coaching from ICM, we're able to prevent that same problem from happening over and over again, so we can move on to bigger and better things."

ICM delivers SAP Consulting Solutions that integrate Business Processes and Technology Solutions across the value chain to make businesses more flexible, more efficient, and better able to adapt to change in order to stay one step ahead of the competition.

Learn more about ICM America, visit:
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