



retarus:

Fourteen days

IT, service and EDI provider implements ERP system in record time

Retarus GmbH looks back on an emotional year: the move to new premises as well as the selection and implementation of a new ERP system took place at the same time. Thanks to the good preparations, competent partners and a flexible ERP system, the company, located in Munich, was able to achieve this in record time. They only needed two weeks until the new ERP system was ready to "Go Live". The remaining fine adjustments were completed after three weeks.

„We actually would need three ERP systems for our three very different business areas.“ The requirements for an ERP system could not be more complex: Retarus GmbH, both IT and service provider, has been providing IT and communication solutions since 1992 and made a turnover of 15 Million Euro in 2003. The second half of 2003 were busy months for Manfred Stauch, authorized representative, and Johannes Hecker, commercial assistant of the management. When looking for a suitable ERP system, people at Retarus had already prepared to compromise. „There did not seem to be an ideal solution for the divers requirements of our three business areas,“ says Stauch, authorized assistant and head of finances. The company offers services and products for internal and external business communication (Business-to-Business).

The corporate messaging supports the communication in the company and between the companies. These include, amongst others, the Email technology, groupware and workflow systems. Comprehensive consultation, selling the respective software as well as outsourcing services (e.g. data processing center operation of applications and infrastructure components) are parts of the Retarus portfolio. As IT provider, the company offers, among other things, the groupware solution Domino/Notes and has established itself as largest medium-sized software partner for IBM in Germany.

Email marketing for the messaging specialist are services regarding the sending of Email, fax or SMS.

Retarus takes on the sending of documents for its customers. A true renaissance was seen for the fax technology, due to the increasing number of Emails and the therefore implemented spam filter solutions. Consequently less and less information is reaching the actual recipient per Email, so that many senders have to rely more and more on the traditional fax again. Especially advertisements for workshops or last minute offers in tourism thus get to the recipient in a reliable manner. Two Retarus data processing centers make sure that thousands of faxes can be sent at the same time.

The third business area, business transactions, includes the electronic exchange of documents between companies. The electronic sending of documents is one of these transactions the company from Munich provides with its modern IT structure. Customers are thus able to send quotations, order confirmations, packing slips, but also invoices and other documents quickly and securely via the Retarus infrastructure. Prior to sending the fax or Email, the invoice data are processed and formatted according to the format specifications.

For the direct sending of documents between companies or their business applications, Retarus provides an efficient EDI solution (Electronic Data Interchange).





The „Multiformat Cross Converter“ Communix XC enables the fast and efficient transfer of data, converts ERP or CRM data into the desired target format and thus provides a central platform for transferring all kinds of business data. This solution is an interesting alternative for many companies since it is available for the operating systems Windows, Unix and Linux. Retarus provides Communix XC in a special version for abas users, called “easy EDI for abas”.

Time for action

In view of the activities of the various business areas it becomes clear how heterogeneous the requirements at Retarus on an ERP system are: the provider from Munich is IT provider as well as service provider in various sectors and to some extent with a very high occurrence of entries resulting from various customer regulations. Over a thousand outgoing invoices occur every month and are mostly very complex.

In addition, about ten percent of customers are located abroad and therefore the multilingualism of the ERP system plays an important role, since every customer wants to receive its correspondence and invoices in the national language. The use of different currencies must also be ensured. “We already had cases in which things like these were decisive for commissioning,” remembers Hecker.

In the past years the trade system Audial has been in use at Retarus. „The software was able cover our needs in the trade are, but did not support our other business areas in an ideal way,” remembers Hecker. A change to a modern ERP system had been planned for quite a while, since the old software could not be further developed anymore. The maintenance contract that was to be discontinued by December 31st, 2003, was the perfect possibility.

Crucial experience on trade fair

The ERP project group of Retarus had been planning the ERP conversion for a year in advance and had looked at many systems. „At that time we came to the conclusion, that only two ways existed for us: finding a system that would cover most of our requirements ex factory and then to adapt the rest with a lot of effort or high financial cost or to opt for an industry independent system right away, that would be cheap enough to finance the many adjustments,” says Stauch. At the beginning, Retarus did like SAP very much, “but the necessary adjustments would have amounted to six-figure sums – and this obviously discouraged us,” emphasizes Hecker. The second alternative was Sage: a low-priced and flexible system which probably would have fitted pretty good.

The unexpected change came with a trade fair visit to Systems 2003 on the stand of ABAS AG from Karlsruhe.

Company profile Retarus GmbH, Munich

Already since 1992 Retarus supports large and medium-sized companies when optimizing and protecting their business communication. With industry sector spanning and industry specific solutions, which increase security and performance, Retarus is able to provide a competitive edge. The products and services range from fax and Email solutions for direct marketing, to consulting for Lotus Notes, Lotus Workplace and IBM WebSphere, to the electronic sending of documents and XML/EDI integration. Retarus ensures modern information structures and provides a solid base for the competitiveness of businesses. The powerful Retarus data processing center offers all customers a reliable and fast outsourcing possibility for their data, and has been for many years. With numerous partnerships and cooperations, among others with IBM/Lotus, SAP and SuSE Linux, Retarus is able to provide future-oriented and ongoing optimized solutions. Using the promise „your business link“, the 80 people team at Retarus has been working from its new office in Munich since June 2004. The Retarus training center with a great variety of seminars and workshops is directly connected to the office.





„We had actually already decided for Sage, when we got information about abas Trade and saw a presentation of the software on Systems. The employees of Koldt, an ABAS partner, convinced us from the very beginning with their know-how and the features of the system,“ remembers Hecker. Even though a decision had already been made, time was short and the project had already been planned, Retarus arranged another presentation date with the new provider.

Perfectly fitting ERP solution

The presentation did not only unhinge Retarus, but made them change their decision. The advantages of abas Trade immediately convinced the Retarus project team, as the software provides various functions for trade and service businesses



already in the standard. The standard can be easily and flexibly augmented to conform to branch or company specific requirements. A flexible business software such as abas Trade supports trading companies in

the product line policy, as well as the targeting of customers. „As an IT business, we wanted to carry out the operation and the maintenance of the ERP system ourselves. The Linux philosophy and the stability of the system spoke for abas,“ emphasizes Hecker. The possibility to automate entire workstations, as well as the client-server architecture of the system were decisive for Retarus.

The positive overall impression was also due to the long-term ABAS partner Koldt, also located in Munich. „We already knew our soft spots, we knew were to expect problems and were thus able to direct our questions in a target-oriented manner,“ describes Hecker the presentation progress. “We were amazed that the Koldt employees were able to answer all our questions immediately and thus we were able to come to a result quickly,“ adds Stauch.

The intensive preparatory work was now paying off, since many requirements to the system and the ABAS partner could be dealt with in a straight-forward manner and made a quick decision possible. „We knew where our problems were and Koldt did not have to make long presentations but was able to directly concentrate on our special requirements“, summarizes Hecker. The few doubts that remained then could be cleared by the ABAS partner thanks to the great flexibility of the software. „It was incredible how quickly the Koldt employees were able to implement our complex price structure in a demo version and thus made the impression that the Go Live would actually work,“ says authorized officer Stauch. The pressure of time demanded a fast decision: „We had to make the conversion until January 1st, 2004. We did not have a lot of time for a long implementation period.“ Only a few days later, Retarus signed the contract. People at Retarus were sure to have made the right decision.

Year end rally

In the meantime it was mid-November, at the beginning of December the new hardware was installed and the software was implemented. „We were waiting for the ERP conversion in a very relaxed way,“ describes Hecker the feelings of the project team at that time.

The system implementation started at the end of December after the Christmas holidays. The data was transferred by Retarus and only the field definitions in the database were done by Koldt. To restrict the amount of data, a financial statement was created and only the accumulated balances were adopted.

Since abas Trade already contains many functions in the standard setting, very little adjustments had to be made. The necessary adjustments in purchasing/sales and in financial accounting were carried out by the service provider Koldt.

All users were trained with a standard version on a demo system first. Then the training was done in relation to the application, by copying the adjustments to the test installation.



Go Live in January

The Go Live took place on January 9th 2004, after only two weeks, and Retarus was sending out its first invoices. The biggest emphasis was placed on E-Marketing entries, since every fax that is sent must be calculated individually: according to sender time, domestic or abroad, to resolution, express sending and possible customization. This made pricing a very complex process. „The ERP system here automatically adopts huge amounts of billing data from our system. Due to IDocs, we were able to carry out visual checks at the beginning to see whether everything was imported and processed the right way in abas Trade. We were able to get rid of some errors, before invoices were sent to the customers,“ says Stauch. The „finetuning“ of abas ERP was carried out together with Koldt in the three weeks that followed and without any major problems.

The high demands and complex tasks for abas Trade can be seen by means of the corporate messaging business area: the price lists of the software supplier IBM contain very different rebates for various clienteles and change very often. The individual prices as well as outline contract information and terms for trading with licenses are recorded in materials management, as well as all customer data and special contract agreements. At Retarus, no software is stored in the warehouse, but license packages are created for and sold to the customers individually. The fact that various customers have several branch offices which in part order centrally, and in part individually, and in turn have very special demands when it comes to invoicing, facilitates the calculation for Retarus. The ERP system is thus needed when creating the quotation, for the sales order, for the purchase order to the supplier, for the order confirmation to the customer, for posting the goods as well as creating packing slips and invoices. „Using abas Trade we are able to manage all of this very well and we can ensure that every customer gets the right license bundle at the right price,“ says Hecker. In the service area however, the consultation invoices are created in an order-related way after the time sheets have been entered manually.

ERP triathlon

The ERP software abas Trade now supports Retarus in all disciplines of the three business areas and their entirely different processes. „We know now that we have made the right decision and with only one ERP system we are able to operate three entirely different areas: project controlling with invoicing, the trade area, as well as the third and most extensive discipline, the settlement of telecommunication services with bulk data and thousands of entries daily,“ explains Johannes Hecker.

„abas Trade enables us now to invoice more quickly and more accurately, which is an important service for our customers that expect transparent information. However, it is also a big advantage for us, because we are able to invoice our service earlier and thus are able to improve our liquidity,“ emphasizes Stauch.