

CHEP, a Brambles company, has helped change the economics of global shipping. Its worldwide pallet and container pooling service saves resources, slashes waste and significantly improves supply chain efficiencies. The company manages the use, movement and reuse of more than 280 million pallets and containers worldwide. Among the 300,000+ companies CHEP serves are customers with household names in the consumer goods, produce, meat, home improvement, beverage, raw materials, petrochemical and automotive industries.

“My lead ABAP developer wasn't sure about the Rev-Trac benefits and insisted on seeing it work. A couple of weeks later he pulled me aside and told me “it's beautiful!” He was thrilled that he's no longer managing objects and transports anymore – he's actually managing change.”

Susan Cannington,
Basis Team Member and
Infrastructure Project Lead,
Orlando, Fla., CHEP



Challenge

In early 2006, CHEP's global operations were managing the movement of 280 million pallets around the world using a combination of sophisticated

interfacing systems and highly customized SAP applications.

Huge volumes of data were generated as CHEP tracked every pallet and container through its service life with near-real-time location and schedule data. Each movement or operation added a separate billable line item to a total that mounted to more than a million transactions a week. More than 100,000 billing documents were generated per month, some with 30,000 or more separate line items.

CHEP relied heavily on the systems that tracked and billed these movements. They had to remain stable and highly available. Any unplanned downtime could have serious revenue consequences that would mount by the minute, and could result in the loss of customers.

Customer story

To achieve greater cost efficiencies, however, the company now needed to integrate its SAP applications with legacy systems currently used by regional operations in New Zealand, Australia and South Africa. At the same time, CHEP needed to upgrade its existing SAP BW infrastructure to take advantage of features the regional operations required.

Completing these two projects concurrently in three regions without interrupting CHEP's core business would clearly be a significant challenge.

To manage the risks associated with the high volume of complex technical changes required, CHEP asked Basis Team Member and Infrastructure Project Lead Susan Cannington and her team to devise and implement a change control strategy. Her objective would be to allow the regional integration project to be completed successfully in a series of phased releases with minimal risk to the company's operations and revenue flows.

At the time when these projects were first planned, CHEP's method for controlling SAP changes relied heavily on manual processes and spreadsheets, supplemented by paper-based approval forms and a home-grown transport migration utility.

Cannington had first hand experience of how difficult it could be to work with this methodology during a 4.6 to ECC5 upgrade which involved the creation of more than 700 transports over a six month period. Using only spreadsheets to track the contents of each of these transports and to ensure that all the required transports were migrated in the correct sequence (to prevent system malfunctions and downtime) had proved difficult, to the point where some transports had been migrated initially in the wrong sequence, or had not been migrated at all.

Cannington was concerned that applying the same methodology to the integration and BW upgrade projects could put both

projects at risk, given that developers would be creating several hundred transports each week on these projects, and the expected lifetime of both projects was considerably longer.

Cannington knew the success of the complex and interrelated new projects now planned would hinge on implementing a more sophisticated change management process.

“Our managers were tied to a paper approval process before. It was very, very tedious and very unproductive. The audit now is immensely better and we're not always trying to track someone down who may be at lunch.”

Requirements

To complete the regional integration and SAP BW upgrade projects, CHEP would need to manage a total of five landscapes for the duration of the projects:

- Three production support landscapes for R/3, BW and SRM.
- An integration project landscape, where a new version of R/3 would be developed and tested to integrate the requirements of the New Zealand, Australia and South Africa regions with those of the global business
- A BW upgrade landscape, where copies of CHEP's existing BW systems would be technically upgraded to run the latest BI software, and where any further adjustments required to accommodate local system customization would be made and tested

As the projects moved forward, CHEP's change team would continue to implement business requirements for the existing R/3, BW and SRM applications

in the production support landscapes. At the same time, changes made in each production support landscape would need to be reapplied – or at least considered for reapplication – in the associated project landscape. Any cross-landscape contentions (where, for example, the same software object or configuration setting had been subject to a different change in both a production support and project landscape) would need to be managed carefully to avoid unexpected or unwanted system behavior.

“Object locking reduces the risk to our production instance due to the volume of projects we have running simultaneously. Clustering related transports is a natural part of Rev-Trac. We never lose transports anymore. The whole process is now smooth and seamless”

Approach

After conducting a close analysis of project requirements and reviewing different approaches with her team, Cannington strongly recommended that CHEP take a look at Rev-Trac.

“I’d already seen how Rev-Trac made it easy to manage multiple waves of concurrent change when I was an independent consultant at a global oil refining and retailing company,” says Cannington. “I could see a similar pattern in the challenges arising now at CHEP, and I knew we would find these hard to address without Rev-Trac.”

Cannington’s analysis and recommendations were approved by CHEP and implementation began. Implementing Rev-Trac itself was not difficult at any time, Cannington reports. Rev-Trac was implemented and fully operational in only four weeks. RSC needed to send only a single consultant, for one week, to fine-tune the configuration. The CHEP IT staff did the rest.

“I’d used Rev-Trac before, so it was actually already configured when the consultant arrived,” says Cannington. “All we had to do was tweak it. The complexity of

configuring Rev-Trac is directly related to the complexity of your approval processes and the scope of changes you are seeking to control. Rev-Trac handles various levels of process complexity without difficulty.”

Over a two-month period, more than 90 CHEP personnel attended two-hour training sessions in groups of ten or so to learn to use Rev-Trac. Extending small-group training over this period minimized the impact on staffing levels and eased the learning curve.

Result

When the integration and upgrade projects hit their stride, the results were every bit as good as Cannington had hoped.

Cannington says Rev-Trac has played a vital role in mitigating project risks as the multiple-region CHEP projects have progressed.

“Because every new transport must be attached to a Rev-Trac request that represents, say, a single functional requirement, we are now able to manage changes meaningfully at a functional, rather than purely technical level,” she says.

Cannington says a clear benefit of this model is that users have a better insight into the functional significance of their actions, and that helps them make better decisions. For example, before approving the migration of a change into test or production, a user can study specifications or test results attached to the Rev-Trac request to verify the nature or current status of the change. Rev-Trac can even enforce rules about what information must be associated with each type of change at different points in its lifecycle.

After the relevant users give online approval, says Cannington, Rev-Trac migrates all the transports associated with a functional change as a group. This eliminates the risk that a required transport will not be migrated, which could threaten the stability of the target system.

In the past, Cannington says, consultants working at CHEP on short-term assignments would sometimes implement changes and then depart without leaving a record to enable their successors to understand the significance or status of the work performed. Cannington says implementing Rev-Trac has

eliminated this practice and with it, another source of significant risk, because Rev-Trac keeps a detailed history of every change.

Another product feature Cannington has found to be of major benefit is Rev-Trac’s ability to alert developers in one landscape if developers or testers in another potentially converging landscape are working on the same object. This can occur even after the first developer’s changes have been released. By prompting developers to co-ordinate their changes in this situation, Rev-Trac has cut the risk that changes will be unintentionally overwritten when the project and production support changes are blended. As a result, Rev-Trac has helped to eliminate unnecessary rework as well.

Rev-Trac’s request-cloning feature allows Cannington’s group to keep both project landscapes synchronised with their equivalent production support landscapes. As a result, project development always takes account of current production support functionality, and project testing always occurs in the most appropriate environment.

Cannington says that besides cutting risks, Rev-Trac has introduced significant productivity gains. It has allowed the equivalent of one fulltime consultant to be employed on other work and has completely eliminated the time users previously wasted chasing down others to approve paper forms.

“Our people like Rev-Trac workflow,” Cannington says. “I don’t think anyone realized before implementation just how much this could improve our processes. And of course we no longer have to maintain our complex spreadsheets. Rev-Trac tracks all those details for us automatically.”

Cannington also expects audits to be much easier, as Rev-Trac maintains a full history of every change, down to the finest details.

“Summing up, I’d say Rev-Trac has made a very significant contribution to our ability to carry out two major SAP projects in a highly volatile environment. Rev-Trac has helped us mitigate the risks and has helped us get a much better understanding of the changes that we’re managing. We really know what we’re managing now.”



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“Between the emails and the approval processes, everybody is satisfied. They didn’t realize how much Rev-Trac change management would enhance our current change processes and how much time we would save.”

Susan Cannington, Basis Team Member and Infrastructure Project Lead, Orlando, Fla., CHEP

