

Change Management Made Easy?

By Helen Gallagher
CRM Buyer
04/14/04 4:02 AM PT



Guy Gagne of Textron, which has implemented Rev-Trac, told CRM Buyer that his audit team appreciates the "down-to-earth key reporting requirements feature of Rev-Trac. When someone makes a change, they have to sign their name to say they did it and that they accept this change, which is a very strong piece of accountability."

[SAP](#) (NYSE: SAP) is a recognized leader in enterprise-level collaborative software for enhanced business process visibility and control. More than 600 companies partner with the company, offering add-on systems to enhance its utility. One of them, Revelation Software Concepts (RSC) of Melbourne, Australia, recently announced SAP certification for Rev-Trac version 5.0, the company's change control management tool.

Rev-Trac takes a strategic approach to managing change at the business level within SAP. Specifically, it intercepts all system changes, enforces consistent change management procedures and allows fully automated propagation of changes. Along the way, according to RSC, it eliminates much of the risk involved in managing and disseminating change in complex SAP environments.

Need for Change Control

"One consistent theme we are seeing is companies, regardless of their level of sophistication, discover they need to become more careful about how they operate their software systems," Jim Duggan, [Gartner](#) research vice president for application development, told CRM Buyer. "Often, companies need to take cost out by creating processes they can automate, but [they] can't always deal with the resulting complexity."

"Commonly, companies think they are simplifying their lives by buying SAP or other ERP packages, but these programs are pretty sophisticated," Duggan added. "They need something to help them through the management of change. Whether it is cost driven, complexity driven or agility driven, they have to use a level of process control and automation that wasn't commonly found in distributed computing up until the last few years."

Duggan noted that as companies have moved to packages designed for relatively sophisticated shops, and as SAP has become more popular in smaller organizations, opportunities have opened up for companies like Rev-Trac to fill the gaps between what SAP thought customers would be able to do and what they actually can do.

"While products like Rev-Trac were most interesting originally to smaller shops that couldn't handle complexity without it, once a product is proven, big shops become more and more interested in using change management tools," he said.

Real-Life Example

For example, Textron is a Fortune 500 company using Rev-Trac to manage five concurrent SAP projects for its industrial group and for aerospace and defense. Textron's SAP center of excellence director for project planning, Guy Gagne, told CRM Buyer that 3,500 to 4,000 people are using SAP across these five projects.

"SAP has very strong change management built in, but what we needed to do in our programs across Textron [was] make sure we [were] communicating directly with all project teams," Gagne said. "We were missing a formal communication workflow mechanism among different projects, companies and locations. Rev-Trac has given us a very strong change control tool, tracking all changes inside SAP from a centralized view."

He added that although the project teams initially showed reluctance to change their methodology, they now embrace Rev-Trac wholeheartedly, recognizing the value of communications. "The change process is under the radar of the executive teams," he said, "but they know this tool gives us the traceability and accountability for everything that takes place in their system."

Change at the Business Level

Issues related to managing change within SAP are generic to all SAP customers, according to Rick Porter, RSC's vice president of business development. "The larger they are and more dynamic, the greater likelihood of gaining value from Rev-Trac," he said.

In fact, as businesses become larger, a cycle often arises that Porter refers to as "grow huge and rationalize, grow huge and rationalize," in which a number of different projects are ongoing with different workgroups in various divisions. This dynamic business environment requires a system to manage change like never before.

Change also can cause frustration. Porter told CRM Buyer that the difficulty of managing change well is a frustration common to all ERP systems. High-level managers are interested in the progress of business issues, while the tech team is interested in objects and tables. Establishing channels of communication between the two factions is always difficult, yet success depends on tracking and documenting changes.

Rev-Trac recognizes different types of change, he said. First, it is a business process enforcement tool that captures every request as it is created in SAP. Next, it forces the creator of each transport request to relate the request back to the business issue it was set to resolve. No changes are made unless they resolve a business issue. As a result, it becomes a requirement to ensure each technology change is tied to a business issue.

Aid in Compliance

Adding to the need for business process management, recent requirements stipulated by the Sarbanes-Oxley Act have created a greater need for internal controls in companies doing business in U.S. markets.

"Corporate governance initiatives will continue to expand and be required more and more by auditors," Duggan said. "The immediate impact Sarbanes-Oxley will have on some industries will be very important, where valuation is heavily dependent on software systems. But if the SEC is light-handed, we'll see a lot of companies going only a little way down the path in improving traceability of their numbers. Right now it's a lot more 'sound and fury' than activity."

For his part, Porter noted: "Companies in pharmaceutical and consumer goods, in particular, which are highly regulated by the government, need auditability on every change. Most companies are still grappling with the reporting aspects of Sarbanes-Oxley, and this is part of the internal controls that hasn't filtered all the way down yet."

Gagne commented that Textron's audit team appreciates the "down-to-earth key reporting requirements feature of Rev-Trac. When someone makes a change, they have to sign their name to say they did it and that they accept this change, which is a very strong piece of accountability."

Although Rev-Trac 4.0 was uncertified for many years, and customers were quite happy to purchase and use it during that time, Porter said the company chose to pursue the certification process with SAP a few years ago.

"It proved valuable from both a customer perception and marketing point of view, but also provided an added benefit for us," he said. "By following the tight integration required by SAP, we developed a much better platform for development with Rev-Trac 5.0. Perhaps Rev-Trac was ahead of its time, but now it's in the right place at the right time." 