

| case study |



Ecotrans Moves Forward with Topaz

“Having plenty of experience of implementing financial packages, I can state confidently that the quality of the Topaz solution is very high. Its capabilities impressed us right from the start.”

Mike Hotchkin, group financial director, Ecotrans

Ecotrans is one of eastern England’s leading shipping and freight forwarding organisations, specialising in direct services to Scandinavia and mainland Europe as well as air freight and deep-sea shipments worldwide. Headquartered in Grimsby, the group offers a comprehensive range of services through six subsidiary companies and has an extensive network of agents in all major countries.

As a locally owned, independent company, Ecotrans faces stiff competition from large international operators. One of the key success factors in the very competitive transport market is the ability to exert tight control over internal costs. To achieve this, Ecotrans recently decided to replace its ageing financial system with a leading-edge solution that would enable it to report more quickly and accurately on its data.

Although it had successfully used the UNIX-based Kismet solution from Topaz for many years, Ecotrans decided to evaluate the market before selecting a replacement. After looking at products from companies such as Sage and Coda, it concluded that the

Windows-based solution suite from Topaz provided the best fit for its needs.

“From past experience, we had confidence in Topaz as a supplier of high-quality products. However, the most important single factor in our decision was the partnership between Topaz and FCL. FCL’s freight forwarding solution, Forward Office, is one of our core applications, and the fact that it is integrated with Topaz Financials represents a significant advantage,” said Mike Hotchkin, group financial director at Ecotrans.

A challenging implementation

Ecotrans installed the Sales Ledger, Purchase Ledger, Nominal/General Ledger and Cash Book modules of Topaz Financials. It also implemented the Payroll and Personnel Management modules of Topaz EMS. This software runs on a HP ProLiant ML70 server under MS Windows 2000, with a Microsoft SQL Server database. It is integrated with Road Tech’s Roadrunner haulage software as well as with Forward Office. During the implementation project, Ecotrans worked closely with both Topaz and FCL.



Company

- Ecotrans Group

Business

- Shipping and freight forwarding

Software solution

- Topaz Financials
- Topaz EMS

Benefits

- More efficient internal processes
- Faster, more accurate management reporting
- Reduced costs
- Better cost control
- Enhanced competitive edge

According to Hotchkin, the implementation was exceptionally challenging because it involved changing all the nominal codes used by every company within the Ecotrans Group, as well as thousands of account numbers. Another important feature was the need to ensure that the interface between the Windows-based Topaz system and UNIX-based FCL system worked properly. In the event, everything went smoothly.

"The skills and knowledge of the Topaz team played a central role in ensuring a successful implementation," commented Hotchkin. "Topaz also provided us with an excellent training programme."

Improved cost control

Every company in the Ecotrans Group now has access to the same financial, payroll and personnel management software. On the financial side, one of the main benefits is better management reporting. The existence of sophisticated capabilities for data manipulation and analysis means that the group's monthly management accounts can be produced much more easily and quickly than before.

In the group's haulage business, costs can now be allocated to specific vehicles without difficulty, so that managers have a much clearer picture of what is going on. Topaz Financials also supports the creation of invoices directly from the accounting system rather than from the group's operational systems. This provides better control of costs. In addition, the system's credit control routines lead to improved cashflow.

More generally, the Topaz system's support for more efficient internal processes reduces the time employees spend on routine administration. The ability to import and export information using spreadsheets, for example, cuts down on the resources devoted to data entry. Improvements such as these lead directly to cost savings and at the same time enable Ecotrans to make better use of its workforce. According to

Hotchkin, people can play a proactive role in helping to achieve business goals rather than merely performing repetitive tasks.

Moving forward in a tough industry

End-users have welcomed the new Windows-based implementation and are finding the solution much easier to work with. At the same time, maintenance is much more straightforward. External customers benefit because they can be provided with information more quickly. Should a customer ring up with a query about a particular account, the person dealing with the query can immediately call up the relevant data onto his or her computer screen.

Looking further ahead, Hotchkin expects that the Topaz solution will strengthen his company's competitive position. This is not just a question of cutting internal costs.

"Because Topaz enables us to produce management figures more quickly and more accurately, we expect to have much better control over our business. This in turn will sharpen our competitive edge and help us to move forward in a very tough industry," he commented.

"Having plenty of experience of implementing financial packages, I can state confidently that the quality of the Topaz solution is very high. Its capabilities impressed us right from the start. As our knowledge of the solution develops, we expect to gain even more benefits in the future." ■