

RANDOM HOUSE CASE STUDY



At a Glance

Company:
Random House

The Book Service (TBS) is the UK's leading book distributor and part of the Random House Group of companies. It is responsible for distributing books to over 9,000 destinations worldwide, and despatches over 100 million books annually.

Objectives

To improve the functionality and usability of systems, to migrate from green screens and provide a web-browser front-end, maximising the reuse of existing systems and applications.

Solutions

Attunity Connect provides the new front-end application with access to data within RMS files within Vista. The data is accessed via Attunity's Connect solution and then transferred in XML format for the new application. The result is a fast, cost effective solution which connects legacy systems to the new SEEVIEW application.

Legacy Data Integration Provides New Solution for Book Distributors

The Book Service (TBS) is the book distribution arm for leading UK publisher The Random House Group and is the UK's leading trade book distributor. TBS distributes books for its parent Random House Group and also for a number of well known third party UK book distributors including Virgin, Little Brown, the AA, Faber and Faber and Lonely Planet books. The division plays a crucial role for the UK's publishing industry – with over 24 percent of UK trade publications distributed by them every year.

The distribution division operates using four warehouses across Britain. The three warehouses at Colchester, Grantham and Wellingborough distribute the books while its returns warehouse is located in Manningtree. TBS operates 24 hours a day between Monday and Saturday to deliver books to key High Street retailers including WH Smith, Waterstones and Books etc. Working together, the distributor's warehouses send out a phenomenal 100 million books per year across the UK and globally, comprising up to 45,000 different titles.

From Green Screens to the Web

At the forefront of book distribution in the UK, TBS has continuously invested in technology, allowing it to improve service, maximize efficiency and minimize cost. A key part of their service is their core ERP solution called Vista which has formed the backbone of the organization's IT systems for nearly 30 years. Within Vista, users were required to access information via green screens.

As the demand from customers grew and the subsequent volume of books that TBS needed to distribute increased, a replacement for the old green screens application was required. It needed a web-based system that was easy to view and use and which could easily be accessed remotely by clients based at home or on the road.

Legacy Challenges Resolved

TBS decided to implement a radical overhaul of the front-end IT systems and worked with a third party IT supplier to create a customized in-house solution. The aim was to help its internal sales teams and third party clients' sales staff access better quality information, faster and more easily in order to deliver an improved service to book retailer clients. As a result, the company decided to implement a new web-enabled front-end application called SEEVIEW (Standard Essential Enquiries via Internet Explorer Web Browser).

Colin James, business systems director at the Random House Group, commented: "A major challenge we faced when implementing the new customized solution was that we needed the front-end application to access data in RMS files within Vista. At the time we didn't have the tools for that so we required a tool set to access the data and put it into XML which can then be transferred into the new application. We needed proven data integration technology that delivered a fast, cost effective solution allowing us to connect our legacy systems data with SEEVIEW."

He added: "After looking in detail at a number of data integration solutions we conducted pilot projects and tested with them all. We chose Attunity and AIS as the best fit for our business. There were a number of compelling reasons why we selected Attunity. Firstly, we chose the company because of its expertise and track record in data integration. Its response to inquiries was excellent - it provided documentation and support quickly and efficiently. On a technology level, Attunity was able to satisfy one of the major objectives of migrating to a .NET platform by providing good integration with our .NET environment."

Benefits

- Capitalizes on in-house expertise and existing investment in legacy systems
- Improved usability of systems for sales force and executives
- Increased access for all users

"The key advantage is that Attunity data integration software has enabled us to access the data in our Vista records in a more user friendly way. The solution provides our third party clients and us with faster access to better information."

Colin James
Business Systems Director

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Speed of Implementation

Phases 1 and 2 of the SEEVIEW project which linked up 20 - 25 percent of the Vista system to web-based services took four months to complete with Attunity Connect seamlessly incorporated into the system. The users of the new system are typically sales force employees and executives that need to be able to access snapshots of information on the sales of particular books or for a specific client.

James commented: "For instance, if a Lonely Planet salesperson needs information on sales for a particular Waterstones store before a sales visit, they can log into SEEVIEW and, at a glance, access sales of Lonely Planet books for that store from the required period whether it be the last week, last month or last year." He continues: "In a similar way, ePublishers wanting to make enquiries at title or/and sales detail level - SEEVIEW is the ideal tool no matter where they are."

Improved Access

James states: "We have just completed phase four of the project. We are using the latest versions of Attunity to write more mapping files and have also rolled out Attunity Connect for other work-streams within the organization including sales analysis. Our sales teams will be able to use the screens to slice and dice the data for more effective information gathering, sharing and analysis. For instance, users will quickly be able to access a wide range of sales data on individual books, genres, publishing brands or even authors."

Flexibility

He adds: "Furthermore, for a separate new project - our e-fulfillment solution, we are using Attunity to check price and availability on-the-fly and to allow users to reserve stock on the system. This is a separate project but further demonstrates Attunity Connect's flexibility within our organization."

In summing up the benefits of Attunity Connect, James concludes: "The key advantage is that Attunity data integration software has enabled us to access the data in our Vista records in a more user friendly way. The solution provides our third party clients and us with faster access to better information. "

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