

Daunted by SAP Implementation?

1. FTE Automotive found a trouble-free transition with iConnect

The phrase "SAP implementation" might call to mind an ordeal fraught with the kind of misadventures most automotive managers would do anything to avoid.

For some, a migration could drag on for a year and alter the daily procedures of an entire workforce. Important shipments or billings might fall through the cracks between the old system and the new. A mismanaged SAP transition could manage to frustrate employees and disappoint customers at the same time.

Siddiq Khan, Aftermarket Sales Manager of FTE Automotive USA, braced for the unexpected when tasked with converting his Michigan facility over to SAP to align with its German headquarters.

"I thought it was going to be a pretty involved project," he says. "It could affect everyone in the company."

Despite the risks, the conversion came off last year largely as expected inside a tight six-month timeframe.

Khan says he was fortunate to have assistance from a team of SAP consultants from Europe. He also found two major advantages stateside, both from the company's Ann Arbor VAN provider, iConnect.

2. EDI interface and support team continuity

iConnect had already been handling EDI transactions for the parts manufacturer's Michigan operations for years. iConnect technical services also included the capabilities to remap vendor transactions into SAP data structures.

"The reason we held on to iConnect was that our system users were used to the iConnect interface, so the implementation was very simple. The pre-SAP and post-SAP teams were composed of mostly the same people," Khan explains. "There were a few changes here and there, but for the most part everybody had the same support. That was a great advantage for us."

The users at FTE Automotive were accustomed to the proactive updating, responsive problem-solving, and personal relationships that comes from a smaller VAN provider.

They also utilized iConnect's iExchangeWeb interface with great success to monitor its local EDI. Employees experienced little of the procedural disruption training time that often comes with a switch to SAP.

"This was the best part," says Khan. "The users affected by the SAP migration didn't have to relearn a lot of their processes. That definitely saved us a lot of time."

3. Data structures for automotive customers everywhere

he second major advantage, says Khan, was that iConnect already had updated and synced changes of protocols and transaction data structures in SAP, just as it had under its legacy system. This enabled an implementation that relied on two different platforms without creating massive confusion for end users.

The iConnect SAP team rebuilt the system IDoc in SAP for compatibility with FTE European plants and nine of their current trading partners. Steve Bush, Customer Implementation Specialist at iConnect, says the SAP implementation for FTE Automotive had some unusual requirements.

"We weren't doing all of the trading partners -- just a handful. We had to do some special routing for some of the regular old EDI to them as well as do translation to the SAP IDoc, so that made it a little trickier."

The decades of experience iConnect has with the Detroit automakers and their international suppliers proved invaluable in such system migrations.

"At iConnect, there is really no OEM we haven't dealt with in some capacity in the past," he says. "FTE Automotive's targeted trading partners we had already been serving through our other customers. The updated structures are all right here."

With a single team of specialists fluent in both systems, FTE Automotive USA could operate with two systems in tandem without dropping the ball on customer transactions.

"The result," says Bush, "is very few surprises from the end user perspective."

4. Speed, cost, and quality

Current iConnect customers contemplating a migration can enlist the VAN to maintain operational continuity; Bush says that even non-iConnect customers will find advantages. His team prides itself on the quality of implementation, keeping costs in bounds, and timely results.

iConnect's contribution to changeover at FTE Automotive took place over just 3 to 4 months during the whole 6-month timeline. Throughout that period, his team was ahead of the project goals, ready and waiting for the next step from the client's transition consultants. A year later, the same iConnect team is now gradually adding new trading partners, like AutoZone to the manufacturer's successful SAP framework.

Khan sees iConnect's role as crucial to minimizing the unwanted disruptions that comes with a daunting transition. "If we didn't have iConnect the process would have definitely been much more painful. We probably would have had a number of customer issues related to transaction errors," he says.

"I think everyone at iConnect was quite helpful and knowledgeable about what is happening in the industry and in technology. Even if an issue was not an area of their expertise, they would know who to turn to and work with them. From the tech support team to the implementation managers, iConnect has a very efficient team -- cooperative and easy to work with."

How can iConnect implementation management services can help your SAP project? Contact Info@Iconnect-Corp.com (mailto:info@iconnect-corp.com) the team today.

For more about FTE Automotive, visit <https://www.fte-automotive.com> (<https://www.fte-automotive.com>)

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