



SUCCESS STORY – Communisis



Epicor Service Connect Cuts Implementation Time and Improves Productivity for Communisis



Success Highlights

Challenges and Opportunities

- Transforming and porting data from legacy ERP system
- Integrating disparate sites and systems
- Triggering and responding to events inside and outside Epicor

Epicor Solution and Services

- Epicor Service Connect
- Epicor ERP

Benefits

- Import capabilities substantially reduces time to Go Live
- Ability to integrate Epicor and non-Epicor systems seamlessly
- Automation of tasks allows staff to focus on adding value
- Easy to work with visual interface lets user 'draw' workflows

Company Facts

- Location: UK
- Industry: Marketing Services Provider
- Web site: www.communisis.com



“We’ve had impressive increases in our productivity, accuracy and efficiency through the use of Service Connect. It is a very powerful product that we can maintain ourselves.”

Ian Watt, business systems manager – group technology

Communisis plc provides marketing services solutions to some of the biggest brands in Europe. The company is a UK market leader in direct mail production, has the biggest transactional document site in Europe (producing 1.5 million documents a day) and is investing heavily in digital solutions and multi-channel output.

Challenges

When Communisis decided to upgrade to Epicor’s enterprise resource planning (ERP) system the company had several challenges to overcome, the first being, getting data out of the old system, formatting it for Epicor, and then getting it into the software. Second, Communisis needed to share information securely between other systems and sites, and finally, the company needed to be able to automatically trigger tasks both within and outside of Epicor.

“Our business set-up meant that we had to retain some systems, but we wanted Epicor at the heart of everything,” says Ian Watt, Business Systems Manager at Communisis. “We have over 22,000 products and process 800 transactions a day, each with multiple system interaction points that we wanted to automate wherever possible.”

Given the complexity of the operation across its sites, it was essential that business rules and data integrity were maintained with absolute reliability.

About Epicor

Epicor is a global leader delivering business software solutions to the manufacturing, distribution, retail and services industries. Epicor serves more than 33,000 customers in over 150 countries.



The Solution

For Communisis, it was essential that this problem was approached through a solution that would not directly access the underlying database tables or modify the core code of Epicor. It had to be a solution that would understand and respect the rules of the business, as well as be maintainable by the internal team.

Epicor Service Connect was selected for the implementation because of its ability to address all of the company’s challenges in a single application, working in complete harmony with the BPMs (Business Process Management) that the team had setup in Epicor. Service Connect is designed to integrate Epicor and non-Epicor data sources, manipulate data through workflows and defined business rules, before triggering an action, or passing data back to those systems. In this way complex actions can be reduced to workflows that can be consumed as Web services, and utilise XML or other data formats to automate tasks.

Service Connect has an intuitive interface that allows administrators to visually design workflows and the flow of data through them. These workflows sit outside Epicor, and therefore have no effect on the core code of the system, or require programming expertise. Designers can even record processes as they happen and use this as a template for their workflow, which gives teams the power to develop and modify workflows quickly, with the confidence that they are not affecting the upgrade path of their Epicor ERP solution.

Benefits

Before going live, the Communisis team used Service Connect to transfer data from its legacy ERP systems to Epicor. This was achieved by preparing workflows that took the 22,000 parts and records associated with them, such as method of manufacture and transformed them based on specified criteria before importing them into Epicor. Working in this way allowed the team to monitor a number of trial runs so that missing data could be ‘trapped’ and given default values. For example, products with a missing method of manufacture were given a standard method value; this was critical as missing data would impact the forecasting, scheduling and planning once the system went live.

“We saved at least a fortnight over other automated import methods by using Service Connect,” adds Watt. “We were concerned about the complexity of this task, which by hand would have taken months. We were able to do test-runs with Service Connect, analyse the results, tweak the workflows where needed and run them again before committing to a final import.”



During the implementation process, Service Connect also allowed Communisis to replicate some of the processes and features from its previous ERP solution that needed to remain for legacy reasons.

In the live production environment Service Connect today acts as an integration backbone between the Communisis sites and systems. It is playing a constant role in the processing of an average 800 transactions per day, moving data between sites and systems, with no human interaction.

Tasks include the generation of production system jobs, background automation, acting as the link between production data processing systems and the back-flushing of materials to give a true stock position (this alone requires 1,200 adjustments a day). One great example of where Service Connect has excelled for Communisis is overcoming the challenge of sales orders –Service Connect pushes all orders straight through production to shipping and invoicing, without human intervention.

“We’ve reduced the amount of time it takes to get invoices to customers from two days, to two hours. Because this process is now automated the invoices always reflect the data in the system accurately,” adds Watt.

“We’ve had impressive increases in our productivity, accuracy and efficiency through the use of Service Connect. We are using it throughout the business, and it is a very powerful product that we can maintain ourselves,” concludes Watt.



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