

LANSA Case Study

TCM simplifies complex business processes

TCM is an integrated infrastructure and service provider and one of the largest privately owned IT companies in South Africa. TCM has over 600 staff, offices in all major cities, plus numerous satellite branches. In order to maintain its impeccable service record, TCM used Visual LANSA and RAMP to modernize and progressively redevelop its homegrown system for sales and services, to extend the system's functionality and to deliver it inside an integrated visual framework that also includes System21 ERP and a document management solution.

Wayne Impey, Chief Financial Officer at TCM, said "Using RAMP and Visual LANSA, we have taken our legacy systems and left them running while we have systematically upgraded them and replaced components as required. We have been able to follow a pragmatic low risk approach through a phased implementation. The improved efficiency of the modernized solution has contributed to allowing us to double in size while only having to increase our administrative support staff by 20 percent."



Capitalize on Lessons Learned

TCM has strong formal relationships with IBM, HP, Dell, Microsoft, Cisco, SUN, LANSA and many other software and hardware vendors. The company was founded in 1987 and has grown exponentially since.

As there were no suitable packages available for the services area, TCM developed its own, initially using traditional development methodologies based on RPG. The services system has grown with the company over 15 years and evolved to include sales, stock and warranties. The homegrown systems were supplemented with a standard implementation of System21, for which the source code was not available.

The business eventually outgrew this structure. Although most of the required functionality was covered, the system showed a number of structural shortcomings, especially in the sales and stock modules. Moreover, the system still had its original 5250 character-based user interface that required users to navigate through many screens to process a single transaction.

TCM was considering a system replacement. Any new solution had to be representative of 'best business practice' and, as a first choice, packaged solutions were examined for best fit. As TCM already had System21 Financials in place, the first thought was to implement the System21 Sales and Stock modules and integrate the homegrown system with these modules. However, that plan turned out to be problematic and was eventually dropped. The search for solutions from

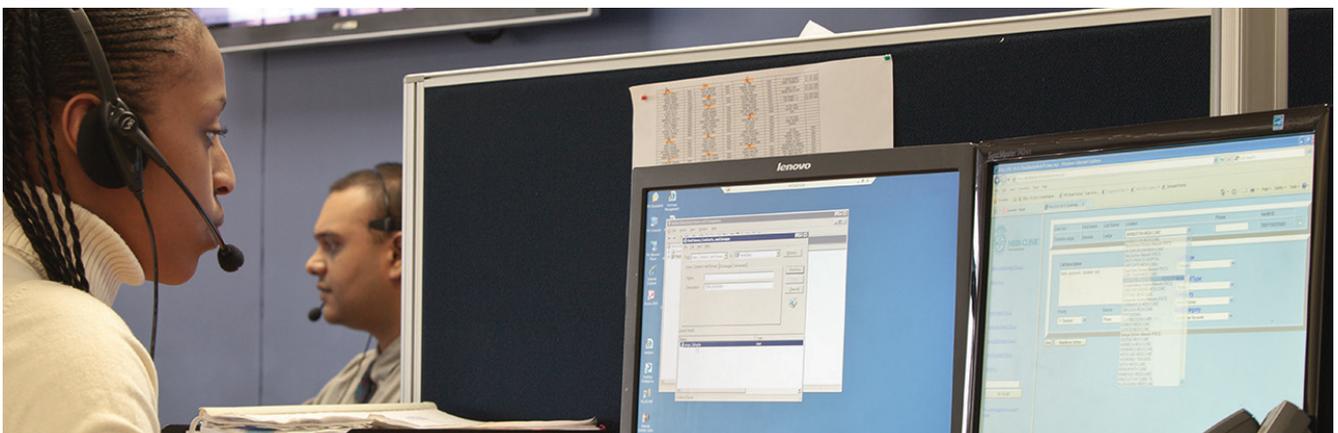
"To us it was a better option to take the virtue of what we had and improve on it."

other vendors didn't result in any suitable outcome either.

Gavin Mills, IS Manager at TCM, explains, "We found that the commercially available solutions were not only very expensive, but also needed a great deal of customization."

In addition to the IT effort and costs of replacing the existing IT systems, TCM found the associated risk to the business disproportionately large. "Migrating to another system would have created a lot of disruption to our daily activities and would have involved a significant amount of training. We looked at various products. We considered the risks and the costs and we came to the conclusion that these ERP vendors were not going to offer anything fundamentally different to what we already had," says Impey.

However, TCM did need to modernize its existing systems, not just by improving the look-and-feel, but also by reworking some of the structural shortcomings and adding new functionality. In searching for a product that could do all this, TCM chose RAMP from LANSA. "To us it was a better option to take the virtue of what we had and improve on it. LANSA allowed us to capitalize on the lessons learned and work done over the years, but without having to take the legacy code forward. RAMP also provided us with the opportunity to improve on the system's shortcomings and add new functionality," continued Impey.



A Phased Approach

TCM's first modernization project phase involved setting up the RAMP Framework for easy navigation. This was followed by the snapping in of the refaced System21 screens, with several improvements in functionality and presentation. For example, TCM added the option of viewing transactions in System21 by 'deal reference', which was implemented by adding an extra table. These improvements were possible even though TCM didn't have the source code.

The second project phase involved improving on the sales, stock and warranty modules, plus integration with MicroFile, a document management system.

Several structural improvements were made in this phase. One example is Built Units, a process that involves assembling a unique machine from a set of parts. Previously this required a user to manually go through a number of screens for each part, by first selecting the part for the custom machine and transferring it from the warehouse to the workshop and then booking the part's transfer into System21.

Mills explains, "It is not uncommon for a machine to be built from over 100 parts. Sometimes it took hours to process a single Built Unit, now it takes only minutes. The user can now select the parts with the point-and-click of a mouse, allowing for a far more rapid selection than what was previously possible. Next, behind the scenes, a RAMP program populates the screens that are needed to pull the parts from the warehouse and run the transactions through System21. The user seemingly takes a few simple steps, but the system generates many different transactions in the background."

The third project phase, which only recently started, is concerned with improving the services system. It includes helpdesk, contract and service level agreement management features, enabling advanced customer service management. This phase involves real-time data integration between the LANSAs-based services application on the IBM i and PDAs carried by TCM's field engineers.

Improved Agility

"We have simplified complex business processes while maintaining the integrity of the underlying applications and



Company and System Information

- Technology Corporate Management Pty Ltd (TCM), headquartered in Johannesburg, is one of South Africa's largest privately owned IT companies with offices in all major cities and 24 satellite branches.
- The LANSAs solutions at TCM integrate with System21 and the MicroFile document management system. For more information please visit: www.tcm.co.za

"The modernized solution has contributed to allowing us to double in size."

business controls," Mills summarizes as one of the key benefits of the system overhaul. "This simplification was achieved by using LANSAs to consolidate multiple screens across various homegrown and packaged systems, dramatically reducing the input of data and the number of screens to navigate."

"The new system contributes to improved agility and a better response to customer needs and market forces," according to Impey. "It has helped us to reduce the business cycle time, as measured from the initiation of a transaction to the collection of cash."

"The improved efficiency has contributed to allowing us to double in size while only having to increase our administrative staff by 20 percent," explains Impey, citing as specific areas of improvement: a productive user interface to the call logging systems, easy allocation of costs to customer business units and improved access to performance reports.

Document handling time has been significantly reduced for both TCM and its customers. Electronic documents are automatically created, archived and distributed upon production and can be retrieved when required, all through the LANSAs Framework.

"Management has been provided with faster access to information to support decision-making, while at an operational level teams are provided with easy access to live information, enabling them to take timely corrective actions when needed," says Impey.

"The modernized system allows us to draw on best business practice, past experience and lessons learned, by combining a mix of software packages and homegrown applications, all presented as one consistent and seamless view to the user through the LANSAs Framework."

With Our Small IT Team

The modernization projects, including setting up the RAMP Framework, the Visual LANSAs extensions, the integration with the document management system and the engineers' PDAs, were carried out by two developers from TCM's own IT team, both new to visual development.

"LANSAs is productive in development, but more importantly we have found that our LANSAs developed applications also require a dramatically reduced level of maintenance," concludes Mills.

Chantal Applewhite, Managing Director at TCM Software & Services, reflects on the fact that TCM, as a long time LANSAs partner, has advised several of its customers to adopt LANSAs. "We believe in the products we sell. Our project provides a great example for our customers of how you can modernize and extend legacy applications using your own small IT team and with minimum risk to the business."

"By putting the existing functionality in the Visual LANSAs Framework, modernizing it and adding new applications, we have provided a solid foundation for further enhancing the IT systems that support our business."

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