

December 2010

COMPUTERWORLD

HONG 香港 KONG

Technology Trendlines

20



Year of the Rabbit

Sobond Far East boosts sourcing efficiency with APEX-Pro supply chain solution

Sobond Far East, a global leader in Asia Pacific product sourcing to drive has transformed its business processes productivity gains, superior business intelligence and indirectly, revenue growth.

Sobond Far East Ltd., established in Hong Kong in 1996, has offices in Shenzhen and Shanghai, and Representatives in Taiwan, Korea and India. The company has a product range of over 5,000 items including DIY, household, gifts, textiles, hand tools, power tools, garden tools and car accessories, electronics and lighting products.

Sobond Far East's main market is Germany and its largest customer the mail order company Westfalia Werkzeugcompany GmbH, but other clients are located throughout Europe, the USA and Australia.

Challenges facing Sobond

In 2006, before the adoption of the Apex-Pro solution, Sobond Far East had an experienced staff and management team who had built a multi-million dollar sourcing business in the Asia Pacific, but the large volume of information required for processing was an obstacle to productivity. Specialists in procurement, QC,

sales, shipping and other functions were using spreadsheets and email so that information could not be shared efficiently.

"The biggest problem was identification of new products, and offering them to customers," said Michael Eden, Managing Director, Sobond Far East. "Each month we have 30 new products and we send out about 100 quotations to customers. With so much information going through the company, it was often difficult to track the status of any one product evaluation by a particular customer."

The problem for managers was getting an overview of what they were doing.

For example, to determine order status might involve collating information about credit authorization, product design, testing and certification, production schedules, or the shipping process. With information fragmented in departmental 'silos' essential information could easily get lost.

Sobond Far East turned to Apex-Pro and Digital China – one of the Mainland's leading IT services providers, which they have a long-term partnership. According to IDC 2009 Report, Digital China is currently China's largest IT distributor which provides consultancy, system integration, hardware and software, and operates from 19 major regional centers and over 30 rep-

resentative offices in China. This group made available its strategic partnership with over 100 leading IT vendors worldwide and a network of over 10,000 resellers and agents across China.

Implementing Apex-Pro

Apex-Pro Systems Limited provides a highly integrated supply chain solution that has been proven over ten years. APEX is part of the New World group and has a company history that goes back to 1990. APEX consultants have a deep understanding of the global supply chain,

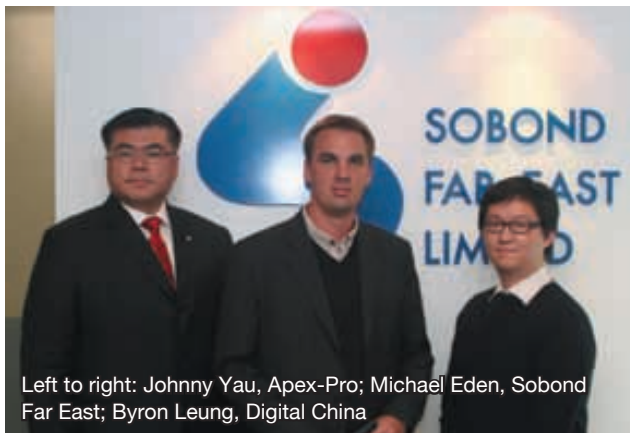
Apex-Pro has boosted the productivity of about 100 key staff and indirectly that has helped our business to grow faster

—Michael Eden, Sobond Far East

from manufactures to end users, so they can provide comprehensive customer support.

The hardware platform adopted was IBM Power Systems, running UNIX. Digital China, which is the largest distributor for IBM Power Systems in Hong Kong, partnered Apex-Pro to execute the system integration, plus the sizing, configuration and hardware provision. "Apex-Pro is a very stable solution," said Johnny Yau, Business Development Manager, Apex-Pro Systems. "UNIX is the most reliable operating system, and the most secure, virtually free of viruses. It is also an advantage to obtain best practice hardware support services from IBM."

APEX carried out implementation of its



Left to right: Johnny Yau, Apex-Pro; Michael Eden, Sobond Far East; Byron Leung, Digital China

supply chain solution which took about six months up to User Acceptance Tests.

The Apex-Pro system is integrated with many applications operated by trade partners. “For example, Sobond’s system is integrated with IBM AS/400 systems through EDI for sharing things like pricing, order status, and delivery dates,” said Yau. “The system is also integrated with accounting application within Sobond’s own corporate group. And it can link with spreadsheets and support email communications.”

There are other supply chain systems available, including some from global software vendors, but they lack sufficient localization. “Apex-Pro was made for the

Quotation, Quotation comparison, Supplier selection, Sales orders, Purchase orders, Order milestone follow up, Inspection booking, Inspection scheduling, Results inspection, Shipping orders and documentation, Invoicing and Email alert.

Benefits of supply chain automation

Before Sobond Far East implemented Apex-Pro, the company’s operational information was fragmented and held in spreadsheets and other systems in non-compatible form. Now the company has a single platform and everybody uses the same system. That means management can determine the status of, for example,

is. They can analyze prices offered by suppliers and see which ones are really supporting Sobond.

Apex-Pro system enables staff to track product information easily not only after customers have ordered them, but while the products are being evaluated and when they are stored under a project number. “The logic in Apex-Pro follows our business process well, but it is also flexible enough that we were able to customize it, for example, to support our unique quality control process,” said Eden. “The application is frequently upgraded with new functions and features, such as the recent new module for supplier relationships. Apex-Pro is highly specialized for merchandising applications – I would recommend it to anyone who is sourcing products.”

Sobond is considering extending Apex-Pro to its customers. “In Europe, especially, there are many regulations on aspects such as packaging and batteries which need to be recorded by QC and made available to our customers,” said Eden, who is also looking for a simpler way of capturing data from products at trade fairs. “The use of iPads or similar mobile devices may enable us to capture details and photographs of hundreds of products for the Apex-Pro database, which would save time and labor,” he said.

In order to support the growth of system usage, the hardware infrastructure should have ability to support and show clear road map to the customer which their platform will not out of dates. “IBM Power Systems has very clear road map on the future development. It gives great confidence to customer for their investment and return,” said Byron Leung.

The biggest problem was identification of new products, and offering them to customers

— Michael Eden, Sobond Far East

Chinese and Asia markets, which means it’s a far better fit for the product procurement and supply chain automation in the Asia Pacific region,” said Byron Leung, Business Development Manager, Enterprise System Unit Hong Kong, Digital China. “My company and our partner APEX both know the Asian market inside out.”

Most new staff members at Sobond learn how to use the application from their colleagues and it takes only a few hours to become proficient. Every year, half-a-dozen staff members attend a refresher course to come up-to-speed on new features.

The Apex-Pro supply chain application supports many sourcing and trade processes, including: Product development,

prospective products discovered at trade shows, offers made to customers, or purchase orders awaiting fulfillment with a few mouse clicks, which speeds operations and increases staff productivity.

“It is impossible to follow up 100 items a month using spreadsheets and manual methods,” said Eden. “Apex-Pro automates our business processes; without it, we would have had to expand our headcount. Apex-Pro has boosted the productivity of about 100 key staff and indirectly that has helped our business to grow faster.”

The system provides business intelligence too. Managers can see how many offers they have sent customers in the last half year, and what the success rate



Authorized Distributor



Service Provider